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THE TOURING ISSUE

Rosalía & Rauw Alejandro

ROMANCE ON THE ROAD

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS 2023

PLUS

LUKE COMBS

TAKES COUNTRY TO THE WORLD

FRAUD ALERT

STREAMING'S $1B NIGHTMARE

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THE TOURING ISSUE

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IS TAKING COUNTRY
MUSIC TO NEW
FRONTIERS

PLUS

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ROMANCE ON
THE ROAD

FRAUD ALERT
STREAMING'S
$1B NIGHTMARE

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS 2023

BMI

LATIN
AWARDS 2023

ICON AWARD

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REGIONAL MEXICAN SONG OF THE YEAR

JUGASTE Y SUFRÍ
DANIEL BALDERRAMA ESPINOZA
BMG Platinum Songs US / DEL Melodies

CONTEMPORARY LATIN SONG OF THE YEAR

PEPAS
VÍCTOR CARDENAS VIIC
IAMCHINO
AXEL QUEZADA "GHETTO"
KERIEL K4G QUIRÓZ
Acere Publishing / Songs In the 305 / Songs of Carbon Fiber Publishing LLC
Sony/ATV Bailar / Sony/ATV Latin Music Publishing LLC
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

LATIN IMPACT AWARD

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REGIONAL MEXICAN SONGWRITERS OF THE YEAR

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La Sinvergüenza / Ojos Cerrados / Ya Supérame

HORACIO PALENCIA
2 Veces / Cada Quien / La Sinvergüenza
Ojos Cerrados / Ya Solo Eres Mi Ex / Ya Supérame

CONTEMPORARY LATIN SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

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Baila Conmigo / Caramelo (Remix) / In Da Getto
Lo Siento BB:/ / Yonaguni

REGIONAL MEXICAN PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

CONTEMPORARY LATIN PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

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HORACIO PALENCIA
11ONCE MUSIC / SONGS OF JG PUBLISHING
SONY/ATV BAILAR

AM (REMIX)
J BALVIN
GOLDI VM MUSIC / LA GALLETA PUBLISHING
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contents

APRIL 1, 2023

VOLUME 135

NO. 4

Features

ON THE ROAD

TOURING 2023

34

HEART BEATS

The stage is a canvas for **Rosalía**'s and **Rauw Alejandro**'s boundless creativity. Off it, the engaged duo takes its relationship just as seriously.

42

THE UNCOMMON EVERYMAN

Pre-pandemic ticket pricing. No pyro. Massive sold-out crowds — on both sides of the Atlantic. How **Luke Combs** became country music's global touring "unicorn."

48

Billboard further explores the stories defining the touring landscape now, including the company cornering the market on music cruises, the new generation of bands dominating the road and the platforms finally giving Ticketmaster some competition.

MASTHEAD

3

BILLBOARD CHARTS

5

Coi Leray lands her first Billboard Hot 100 top 10 with "Players."

THE MARKET

19

According to one estimate, more than $1 billion in royalties is lost to streaming fraud worldwide. But the industry has yet to form a united approach to a global problem.

28

Citrin Cooperman valuation expert **Nari Matsuura** breaks down the process of pricing music assets.

THE SOUND

31

Daniel Caesar is boldly making the major-label leap — while doubling down on R&B innovation.

32

Latin nostalgia tours have raked in millions and, as **RBD** is proving, aren't going anywhere.

THE PLAYERS

55

2023 TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

The best attorneys in the business are defending the rights of their clients, negotiating smart deals — and warily watching the rise of artificial intelligence.

CHARTBREAKER

96

Rising Afrobeats star **Libianca** has become a much-needed voice with breakout hit "People."

ON THE COVERS

Rosalía and Rauw Alejandro photographed by Kanya Iwana on Feb. 11 at Ace Studios in Miami.

Luke Combs photographed by Eric Ryan Anderson on March 14 at the Nashville Municipal Auditorium.

THIS PAGE

Rosalía and Rauw Alejandro

TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on April 22. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

LEGENDARY RECORDING STUDIO FOR SALE

THE COMMERCIAL CONDO AT

THE HIT FACTORY

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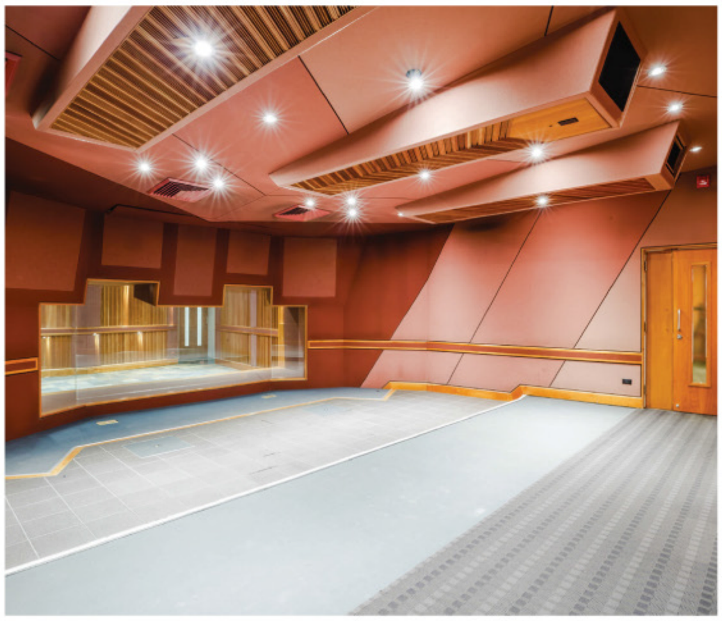
HELL'S KITCHEN, NEW YORK CITY

THE HIT FACTORY



Situated in the heart of Hell's Kitchen, the commercial condo at the **Hit Factory** is globally recognized for its role in producing some of the most celebrated music of this generation. Platinum albums recorded at this location include Billy Joel's *"River of Dreams"* and The Notorious B.I.G.'s *"Ready to Die"*. The vacant unit is comprised of 4 state-of-the-art recording studios that span over 15,000 square feet across the ground and lower floors with ceiling heights up to 16'.

ASKING PRICE: $4,950,000

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charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 4.01.2023

Leray Among Hip-Hop's Rising 'Players'

COI LERAY'S "Players" becomes her first top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 as it surges to No. 9 on the April 1 chart. The song drew 58.5 million in radio airplay audience (up 11%), 10.5 million streams (up 3%) and sold 4,000 (up 5%) in the United States March 17-23, according to Luminate.

The track concurrently leads the Hot Rap Songs chart for a second week.

Leray, who was born in Boston and raised in Hackensack, N.J. — and who presented SZA as the 2023 Woman of the Year at *Billboard*'s Women in Music celebration on March 1 — tallied two prior top 40 Hot 100 hits: "No More Parties" featuring Lil Durk (No. 26, March 2021) and "Blick Blick!" with Nicki Minaj (No. 37, April 2022).

"Players" samples Grandmaster Flash's "The Message," which hit No. 4 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs in 1982. "I feel like this record was [made] to connect the new with the old," Leray recently told *Billboard*. "There's a lot of older cats and OGs ... and it just feels good to bring everybody together. Whether you're 10, 2, 80 or 30, everyone's bopping, and those are the moments I love."

"Players" continues the trend of artists honoring hip-hop's past. According to song analysis platform Hit Songs Deconstructed, only three hip-hop tracks with an "overt retro 1980s influence" hit the top 10 between 2013 and 2021. In the past year, however, just as many have reached the region, with "Players" preceded by two top 10s that also sample early-'80s classics: Latto's "Big Energy" (Tom Tom Club's "Genius of Love") and Minaj's "Super Freaky Girl" (Rick James' "Super Freak").

—GARY TRUST

BILLBOARD HOT 100

9

"Players"
Coi Leray

LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
12	9	12

SAMI DRASIN

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
2	①	1	**#1 for 8 WEEKS** **Flowers** KID HARPOON,T.JOHNSON (M.CYRUS,M.R.POLLACK,G.HEIN)	**Miley Cyrus** SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	1	10
①	2	2	**Last Night** J.MOI (J.BYRON,A.G.GORLEY,J.K.HINDLIN,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	8
3	3	3	**Kill Bill** R.BISEL,C.LANG (S.I.ROWE,R.BISEL,C.LANG)	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	2	15
6	⑤	④	**Creepin'** METRO BOOMIN,DAHEALA (C.L.HAWKINS,E.SERMON,P.SMITH,M.C.JONES,E.N.BHRAONAIN,R.RYAN, N.RYAN,M.M.WINANS)	**Metro Boomin, The Weeknd & 21 Savage** BOOMINATI/REPUBLIC	3	16
4	4	5	**Die For You** THE WEEKND,CIRKUT,DOC MCKINNEY,CASHMERE CAT,PRINCE 85 (A.TESFAYE,M.MCKINNEY,PRINCE 85, DYLAN WIGGINS,M.A.HOIBERG,W.T.WALSH,H.R.WALTER,A.GRANDE)	**The Weeknd & Ariana Grande** XO/REPUBLIC	1	34
⑤	6	6	**Boy's A Liar, Pt. 2** MURA MASA,PINKPANTHERESS (MURA MASA,PINKPANTHERESS,I.GASTON)	**PinkPantheress & Ice Spice** PINKPANTHERESS/PARLOPHONE/ELEKTRA/3EE	3	7
12	7	7	**Anti-Hero** J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF)	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	1	22
⑲	⑧	⑧	**Calm Down** LONDON,ANDRE VIBEZ (M.HUNTER,ANDRE VIBEZ,A.IBANEZ,S.GOMEZ)	**Rema & Selena Gomez** JONZING WORLD/MAVIN/SMG MUSIC/VIRGIN/INTERSCOPE	8	29
24	⑫	⑨	**AIR** **Players** J.GOLDSTEIN (J.GOLDSTEIN,COI LERAY,A.C.KING,F.FERRARO,E.G.FLETCHER,S.ROBINSON,C.CHASE,M.GLOVER)	**Coi Leray** UPTOWN/REPUBLIC	9	12
⑳	⑪	⑩	**Rock And A Hard Place** A.R.SHAWN (H.WARREN,J.HACKWORTH,J.HARVEY)	**Bailey Zimmerman** ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/3EE/WEA	10	41
⑦	9	11	**Thought You Should Know** J.MOI (M.WALLEN,N.GALYON,M.LAMBERT)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	7	32
HOT SHOT DEBUT		⑫	**All Of The Girls You Loved Before** L.BELL,FRANK DUKES,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,L.B.BELL,A.FEENY)	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	12	1
⑧	10	13	**You Proof** J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.WALLEN,A.G.GORLEY,E.K.SMITH,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	5	45
26	⑯	⑭	**Under The Influence** KIDDOMINANT (C.M.BROWN,A.AGBOOLA,T.MCKIE,DAVIDO)	**Chris Brown** CBE/RCA	12	28
23	15	15	**As It Was** KID HARPOON,T.JOHNSON (H.STYLES,T.E.P.HULL,T.JOHNSON)	**Harry Styles** ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	51
21	14	16	**I'm Good (Blue)** D.GUETTA,TIMOFEY (B.REXHA,P.D.GUETTA,G.RANDONE,KAMILLE,M.GABUTTI,M.LOBINA,P.J.PLESTED)	**David Guetta & Bebe Rexha** WHAT A DJ/WARNER	4	30
㉛	25	⑰	**Lavender Haze** J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT,SOUNWAVE,J.A.SWEET (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF,Z.KRAVITZ, M.A.SPEARS,J.A.SWEET,S.J.DEW)	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	2	22
16	13	18	**Unholy** ILYA,CIRKUT,B.SLATKIN,O.FEDI,JIMMY NAPES,S.SMITH (S.SMITH,J.J.NAPIER,I.SALMANZADEH,H.R.WALTER, B.SLATKTIN,O.FEDI,K.PETRAS)	**Sam Smith & Kim Petras** CAPITOL	1	26
22	18	19	**Just Wanna Rock** MCVERTT,SYNTHETIC (S.WOODS,M.CAMARA,J.MERCADO)	**Lil Uzi Vert** GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC	10	23
⑨	17	20	**Thinkin' Bout Me** J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (J.BYRON,A.G.GORLEY,T.PHILLIPS,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	9	3

Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.

Ovy on the Drums, 32, produced and co-wrote Karol G and Shakira's "TQG," which also ranks at No. 1 for a fourth week on Hot Latin Songs.

TNR PUBLIC RELATIONS

HOT 100

22

"TQG"
Karol G x Shakira

How did the collaboration between Karol G and Shakira happen?

OVY ON THE DRUMS [Karol and I] were working on "MAMIII" with Becky G and after we finished, [we] stayed in the studio and the first version of "TQG" was born. I never imagined Shakira on the track — Karol was the one who, out of nowhere, said, "Ovy, Shakira on 'TQG' will be a hit!" [They] didn't meet in person until the filming of the music video, but Karol did record with me and Shakira recorded with her team. The first version was ready for almost a year, but Shakira stepped in around December.

What has been your reaction to the song's chart success?

The day I'm not surprised of having another hit, I'll quit and focus on something else. I do music with so much passion and so much dedication. Every song has a different story, a different meaning and is born in a different way. They're all my babies, and I like seeing each of them succeed. I even got a tattoo of "TQG," because it's my first No. 1 hit [on the Spotify Global Top 50, as well as the Billboard Global 200] as a producer.

Why do you think so many people are connecting with the song?

The beat gives it a nice touch. I'm not only saying this because I'm the producer, but it's the truth. In "TQG," the rhythm was born first. It's a beat that's aggressive, angry and dark. Everything in the song — from the mix, master[ing], lyrics, artists, interpretation, production, the whole team and strategy — is super important. This is the result of two of the biggest artists in Colombia. It's awesome being part of this process and this hit. It's a collaboration for the books. —JESSICA ROIZ

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
Yng Lvcas	**"La Bebe"** with Peso Pluma	77	April 1
Chino Pacas	**"El Gordo Trae El Mando"**	84	April 1
Eladio Carrión	**"Coco Chanel"** with Bad Bunny	87	April 1
Coco Jones	**"ICU"**	88	April 1
Fifty Fifty	**"Cupid"**	100	April 1

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE
BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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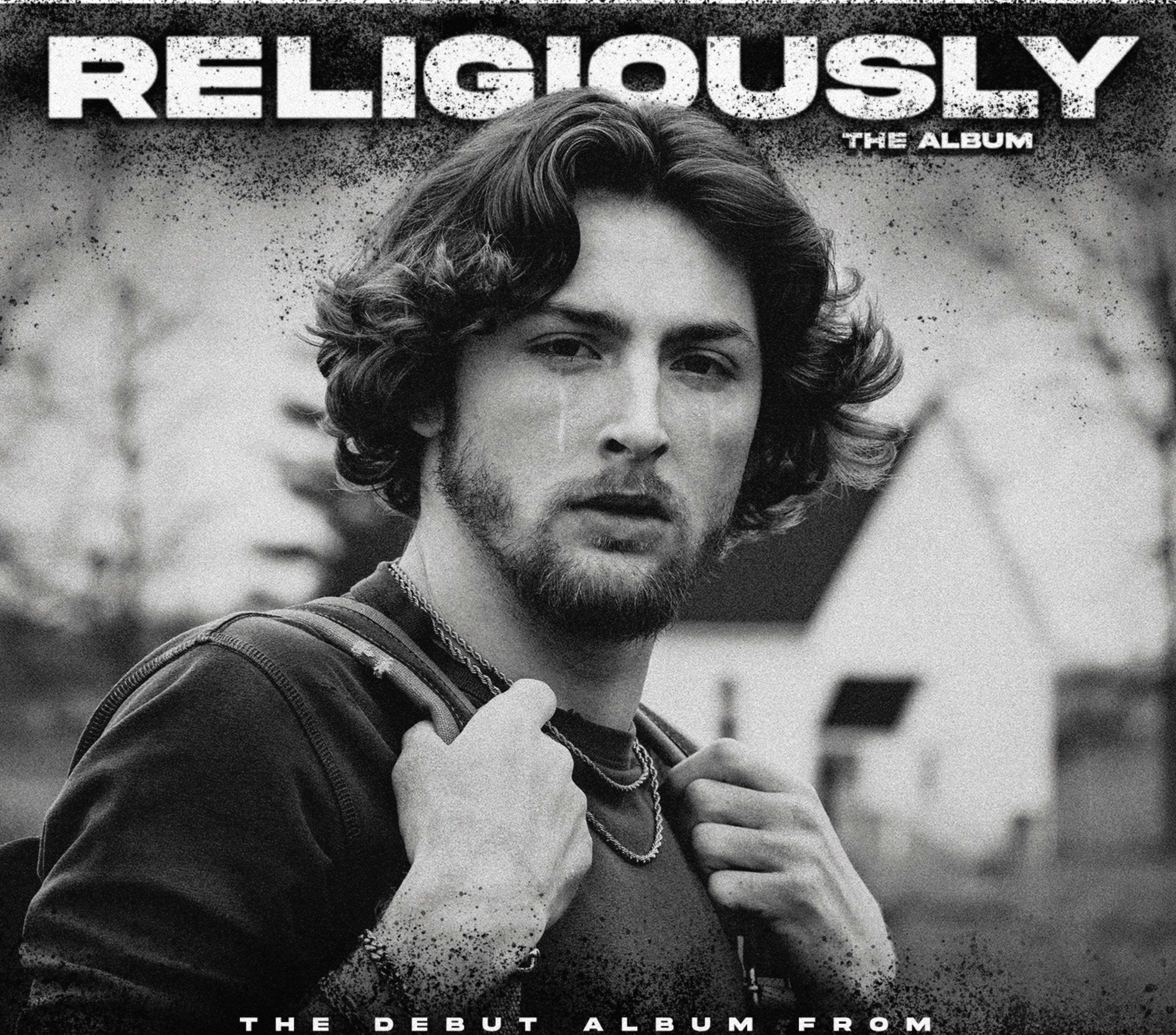

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BILLBOARD 200

1

Morgan Wallen

One Thing at a Time

The release earned 209,500 equivalent album units in the United States in the week ending March 23, according to Luminate. It's the first set to reach 200,000 in each of its first three weeks since Taylor Swift's *Midnights* in November.

5

U2

Songs of Surrender

U2 becomes the fourth group to have earned new top 10s on the Billboard 200 in the 1980s, '90s, 2000s, '10s and now the '20s. The band joins AC/DC, Def Leppard and Metallica.

9

Drake & 21 Savage

Her Loss

For the first time since 2019, Drake issued an album on CD, as *Her Loss* (and solo set *Honestly, Nevermind*) arrived March 17. They sold 3,000 and 2,500, respectively, in the week ending March 23.

3

Taylor Swift

Midnights

For the first time, Taylor Swift has seven albums in the top 40 on the Billboard 200. The superstar holds Nos. 3, 13, 14, 19, 22, 26 and 31 on the chart.

Since the Billboard 200 was combined from its previously separate mono and stereo album charts into one all-encompassing list in August 1963, Swift is only the second act, and first living artist, to have at least seven albums concurrently in the top 40. Previously, the feat had only been achieved after the death of Whitney Houston, when the late superstar also had seven in the top 40 on the chart dated March 17, 2012.

The accomplishment coincides with the launch of Swift's massive The Eras Tour in Glendale, Ariz., on March 17 — along with the corresponding publicity and promotion generated by the career-spanning trek.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
①	1	1	#1 for 3 WEEKS **Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	**One Thing At A Time**	1	3
2	4	2	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	**SOS**	1	15
5	6	③	GG **Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Midnights**	1	22
-	③	4	**Miley Cyrus** SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	**Endless Summer Vacation**	3	2
HOT SHOT DEBUT		⑤	**U2** ISLAND/INTERSCOPE/IGA	**Songs Of Surrender**	5	1
3	5	6	**Karol G** UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	**Manana Sera Bonito**	1	4
6	7	7	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	**Dangerous: The Double Album**	1	115
7	8	⑧	**Metro Boomin** BOOMINATI/REPUBLIC	**Heroes & Villains**	1	16
10	10	⑨	**Drake & 21 Savage** OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	**Her Loss**	1	20
8	9	10	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**Un Verano Sin Ti**	1	46
-	②	11	**TWICE** JYP/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	**Ready To Be: 12th Mini Album (EP)**	2	2
9	11	12	**The Weeknd** XO/REPUBLIC	**Starboy**	1	281
㊸	㉟	⑬	PS **Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Lover**	1	187
38	33	⑭	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Folklore**	1	139
⑫	13	15	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	**American Heartbreak**	5	44
NEW		⑯	**Eladio Carrion** RIMAS	**3MEN2 KBRN**	16	1
16	15	17	**Lil Baby** QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	**It's Only Me**	1	23
17	16	18	**Harry Styles** ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	**Harry's House**	1	44
㊽	㊴	⑲	**Taylor Swift** BIG MACHINE/BMLG	**1989**	1	432
④	14	20	**Kali Uchis** INTERSCOPE/IGA	**Red Moon In Venus**	4	3

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Dra. Tania Medina y Mark B **llegan al #1 de Monitor Latino**

La Dra. Tania Medina, famosa cirujana dominicana, recientemente incursionó como cantante con su sencillo "Enamórate de ti", se posicionó como número 1 en República Dominicana según Monitor Latino. Actualmente, es la canción más reproducida en las estaciones de radio y confirmado en los charts monitor latino General y Bachata. El talento de Medina y su cautivadora canción han llevado su éxito radial a conquistar a toda la audiencia latina.

"Enamórate de Ti" ya alcanzó más de 1 millón de reproducciones en Youtube y figura entre las 20 favoritas en varias listas radiales de Estados Unidos.

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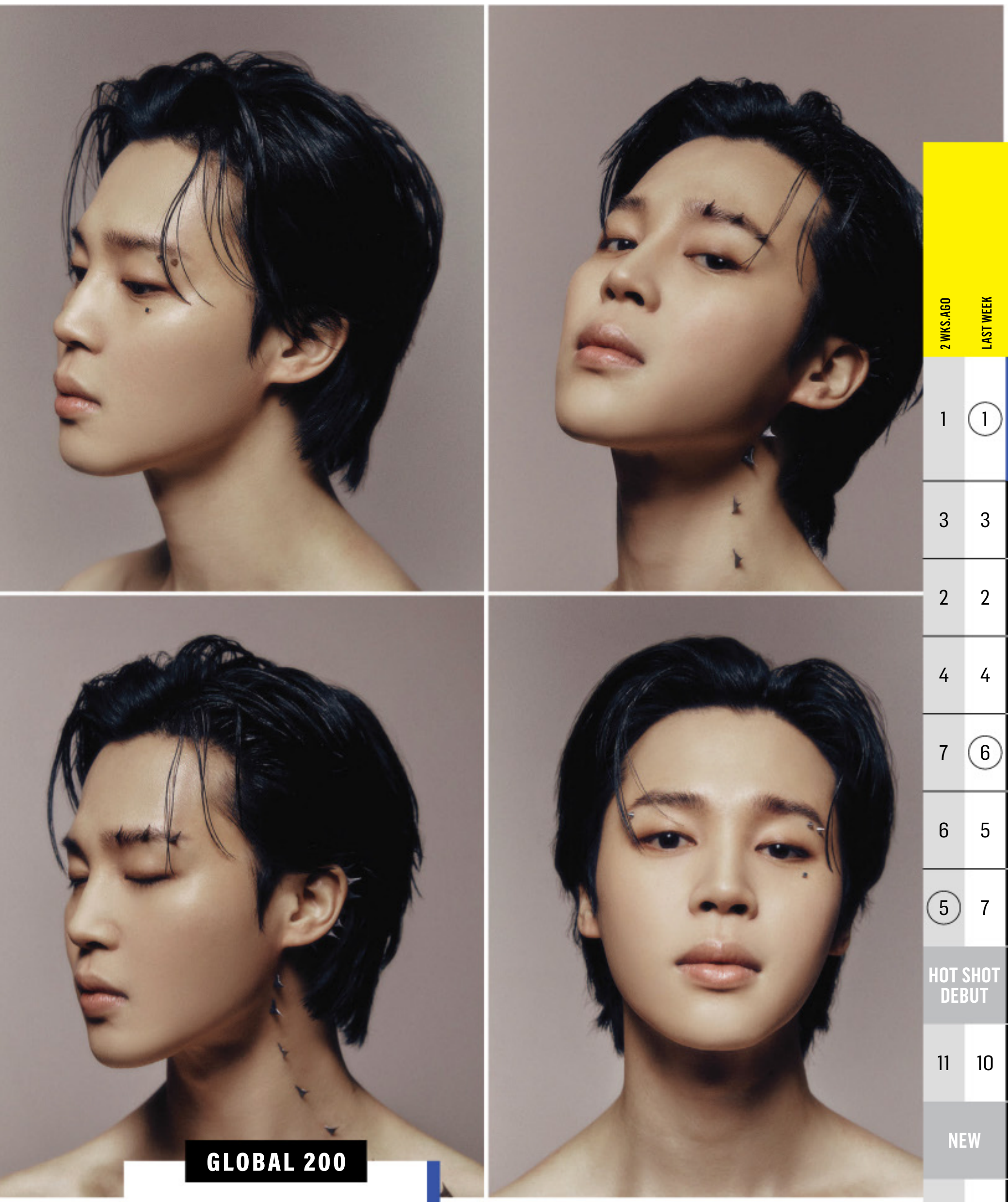

COURTESY OF BIGHIT MUSIC

GLOBAL 200

8

“Set Me Free, Pt. 2”
Jimin

THREE SONGS MAKE splashy starts in the upper reaches of the Billboard Global 200, led by Jimin’s “Set Me Free, Pt. 2” at No. 8. Following its March 17 release, the single begins with 56 million streams and 42,000 sold worldwide in its first week, according to Luminate. Jimin becomes the fourth member of BTS to reach the top 10 of the Global 200 as a solo act, joining Jung Kook (with two such entries), Jin and SUGA. (BTS has accomplished the feat 10 times as a group on the chart.)

Also in the Global 200’s top 10, Taylor Swift’s “All of the Girls You Loved Before,” originally recorded during sessions for her 2019 album, *Lover*, debuts at No. 10 with 34.2 million streams and 22,000 sold globally in its first week. It arrived as one of four songs she released March 17, timed to the kickoff of The Eras Tour that night. Swift achieves her 14th Global 200 top 10, the most among women since the chart began in September 2020; among all acts in that span, only Drake has more (27).

Plus, Eslabon Armado and Peso Pluma debut at No. 12 on the Global 200 with “Ella Baila Sola.” Also released March 17, it drew 46.6 million worldwide streams in its first week. The song is the top-charting hit on the list for both acts: Eslabon Armado earned one prior entry in 2021, while the track is one of six by Peso Pluma on the April 1-dated chart that rank at current peaks. It concurrently enters the U.S.-based Hot Latin Songs chart at No. 2, also marking a new high for both acts. —GARY TRUST AND PAMELA BUSTIOS

Global 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	①	1	#1 for 9 WEEKS **Flowers**	**Miley Cyrus**	1	10
3	3	2	**TQG**	**Karol G x Shakira**	1	4
2	2	3	**Die For You**	**The Weeknd & Ariana Grande**	2	55
4	4	4	**Kill Bill**	**SZA**	1	15
7	⑥	⑤	**Calm Down**	**Rema & Selena Gomez**	3	38
6	5	6	**Boy’s A Liar, Pt. 2**	**PinkPantheress & Ice Spice**	3	7
⑤	7	7	**Last Night**	**Morgan Wallen**	5	8
HOT SHOT DEBUT		⑧	**Set Me Free, Pt. 2**	**Jimin**	8	1
11	10	⑨	**Creepin’**	**Metro Boomin, The Weeknd & 21 Savage**	3	16
NEW		⑩	**All Of The Girls You Loved Before**	**Taylor Swift**	10	1
8	8	11	**Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53**	**Bizarrap & Shakira**	2	11
NEW		⑫	**Ella Baila Sola**	**Eslabon Armado X Peso Pluma**	12	1
9	9	13	**As It Was**	**Harry Styles**	1	51
13	14	⑭	**Anti-Hero**	**Taylor Swift**	1	22
10	11	15	**Unholy**	**Sam Smith & Kim Petras**	1	26
⑭	⑬	16	**Yandel 150**	**Yandel & Feid**	13	11
12	12	17	**I’m Good (Blue)**	**David Guetta & Bebe Rexha**	2	30
15	⑮	18	**Until I Found You**	**Stephen Sanchez**	11	45
17	17	19	**Escapism**	**RAYE Featuring 070 Shake**	7	17
18	18	20	**Sure Thing**	**Miguel**	13	14

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200: THE WEEK’S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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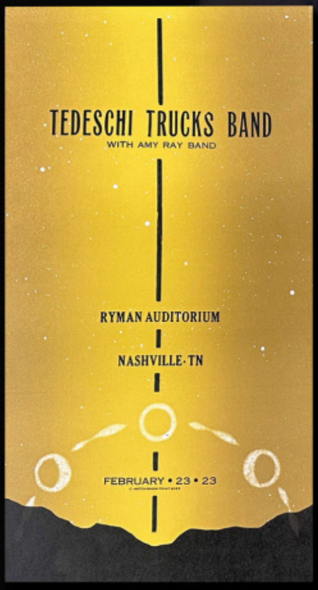
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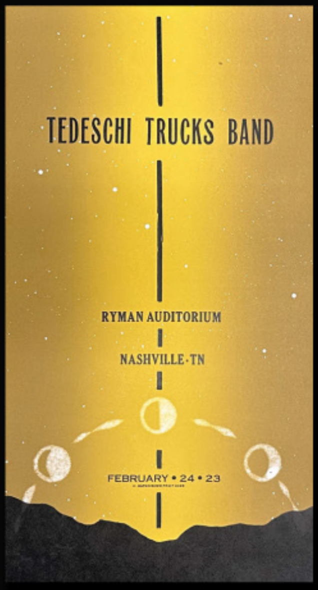
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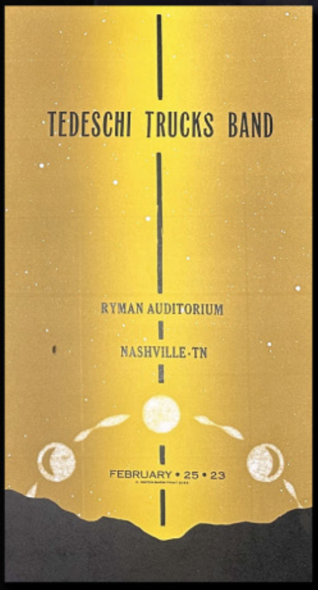
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ARTIST 100

20

BAILEY ZIMMERMAN

WEEKS ON CHART
43

"Rock and a Hard Place" becomes Zimmerman's first Billboard Hot 100 top 10 (rising 11-10) and his second Country Airplay No. 1 after "Fall in Love" in December. His three-month, three-week span between Country Airplay chart-toppers is the quickest for any act's first two since The Chicks in 1998. —GARY TRUST

NO. **27**

Hozier's New Hits

Hozier's three-song return sparks his No. 27 reentry on the Artist 100. Leading the way, "Eat Your Young" begins at No. 67 on the Hot 100 — his first entry on the chart since "Take Me to Church," which reached No. 2 in December 2014 — with 6.9 million U.S. streams, 572,000 radio audience impressions and 3,000 downloads sold, according to Luminate. Two more new tracks join "Eat Your Young" (No. 6) on Hot Rock & Alternative Songs: "All Things End" (No. 19; 2.9 million streams, 2,000 sold) and "Through Me (The Flood)" (No. 22; 2.4 million streams, 2,000 sold). —KEVIN RUTHERFORD

NO. **46**

Martinez Makes Return

"Death," from Melanie Martinez's third studio album, *Portals* (released March 31), debuts at No. 95 on the Hot 100, marking her first appearance on the chart since 2012 and her first original song to accomplish the feat. Her previous two entries, "Seven Nation Army" and "Too Close" in December 2012, were covers from her time on NBC's *The Voice*. "Death" starts with 6.1 million streams and 1,000 downloads sold. It also enters Hot Rock & Alternative Songs at No. 9, becoming her second top 10 and highest-charting hit. Her No. 46 rank on the Artist 100 is her best since September 2019. —K.R.

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	1	**#1 for 10 WEEKS** **Morgan Wallen**	BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	211
3	5	2	**Taylor Swift**	REPUBLIC	1	452
2	4	3	**SZA**	TOP DAWG/RCA	1	186
8	3	4	**Miley Cyrus**	SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	3	126
RE-ENTRY		5	**U2**	ISLAND/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	10
5	7	6	**Luke Combs**	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	316
4	6	7	**The Weeknd**	XO/REPUBLIC	1	402
-	2	8	**TWICE**	JYP/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	1	23
11	8	9	**Drake**	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	456
NEW		10	**Jimin**	BIGHIT MUSIC/GEFFEN/IGA	10	1
12	9	11	**Harry Styles**	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	195
17	13	12	**21 Savage**	SLAUGHTER GANG/EPIC	3	134
16	12	13	**Kendrick Lamar**	PGLANG/TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	377
21	14	14	**Lil Baby**	QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN	1	254
13	10	15	**Rihanna**	WESTBURY ROAD/ROC NATION	1	255
22	15	16	**Ed Sheeran**	ATLANTIC/AG	1	449
30	20	17	**Fleetwood Mac**	WARNER/RHINO	3	207
20	18	18	**Future**	FREEBANDZ/EPIC	1	279
14	11	19	**Karol G**	UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	5	36
29	22	20	**Bailey Zimmerman**	ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/3EE/WMN	9	43

ZIMMERMAN: CHRIS ASHLEE. HOZIER: BARRY McCALL. MARTINEZ: MELANIE MARTINEZ & JACQUELINE MOLINA.

AIRPLAY, SALES
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Sheeran onstage in November.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Ed Sheeran returns to the top of *Billboard*'s monthly Boxscore report while the Red Hot Chili Peppers double up

WHILE THE FIRST DAYS OF SPRING in the Western Hemisphere have brought a rise in temperatures, Oceania keeps bringing the heat to the Billboard Boxscore charts as stadium shows in Australia and New Zealand continue delivering blockbuster numbers. After Elton John earned the highest-grossing tour in January, Ed Sheeran picks up the mantle in February: According to figures reported to Boxscore, The Mathematics Tour — also stylized as The +–=÷× Tour, in accordance with his sign-themed album titles — grossed $50.6 million and sold over 475,000 tickets throughout the short month.

Sheeran played three shows in New Zealand and five in Australia, and his stints in Brisbane and Sydney, respectively, captured Nos. 1 and 2 on Top Boxscores. Seven of February's top 10 boxscores are from Oceania: three by Sheeran, one by Harry Styles and three by Red Hot Chili Peppers/Post Malone. The latter duo co-headlined a series of dates that earned $33.1 million, putting the acts at No. 2 on Top Tours. But the Chili Peppers double up at No. 6 with their own headlining shows in Asia. The long-standing rock band is the first act to score two entries on the Top Tours chart since it launched in February 2019. —ERIC FRANKENBERG

Top Tours

	Artist	Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Ed Sheeran	$50,635,982	475,427	8
2	Red Hot Chili Peppers & Post Malone	$33,074,997	262,689	5
3	Harry Styles	$28,791,611	204,112	5
4	Carrie Underwood	$17,098,580	162,953	15
5	Backstreet Boys	$13,225,127	104,558	8
6	Red Hot Chili Peppers	$12,140,242	77,987	3
7	Bruno Mars	$11,396,867	35,764	7
8	Michael Bublé	$10,933,213	98,109	12
9	Journey	$10,151,531	92,285	9
10	Def Leppard & Mötley Crüe	$8,503,482	101,692	3

Top Boxscores

	Artist(s) VENUE DATE	Gross TICKET PRICES	Total Attendance NO. OF SHOWS	Promoter(s)
1	**Ed Sheeran** SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 17-19	$19,213,071 $130.99/$103.40/$75.81/$62.01	172,894 3	Frontier Touring/ Mushroom Group
2	**Ed Sheeran** ACCOR STADIUM, SYDNEY FEB. 24-25	$18,936,619 $129.45/$102.18/$74.91/$61.28	171,699 2	Frontier Touring/ Mushroom Group
3	**Electric Daisy Carnival** AUTODROMO HERMANOS RODRIGUEZ, MEXICO CITY FEB. 24-26	$16,407,262 $61.04	268,806 3	OCESA
4	**Harry Styles** MARVEL STADIUM, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 24-25	$15,042,107 $193.80/$58.52	114,616 2	Live Nation
5	**Red Hot Chili Peppers & Post Malone** ACCOR STADIUM, SYDNEY FEB. 2, 4	$13,450,562 $212.03/$55.93	106,974 2	Live Nation
6	**Red Hot Chili Peppers & Post Malone** MARVEL STADIUM, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 7, 9	$12,785,784 $206.29/$54.52	104,535 2	Live Nation
7	**Bruno Mars** DOLBY LIVE, LAS VEGAS FEB. 1, 3-4, 8, 10-11, 14	$11,396,867 $600/$99.50	35,764 7	MGM Resorts International
8	**Ed Sheeran** EDEN PARK, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND FEB. 10-11	$7,461,871 $120.47/$95.10/$69.72/$57.03	83,574 2	Frontier Touring/ Mushroom Group
9	**Red Hot Chili Peppers** TOKYO DOME, TOKYO FEB. 19	$7,248,690 $1,863.07/$137.87	45,319 1	Live Nation
10	**Red Hot Chili Peppers & Post Malone** OPTUS STADIUM, PERTH, AUSTRALIA FEB. 12	$6,838,651 $207.18/$54.65	51,180 1	Live Nation

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Top Venues

15,001 OR MORE CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Accor Stadium** SYDNEY	$32,387,181	278,673	4
2	**Marvel Stadium** MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA	$27,827,891	219,151	4
3	**Suncorp Stadium** BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA	$19,213,071	172,894	3
4	**O2 Arena** LONDON	$10,687,667	122,222	12
5	**Barclays Center** BROOKLYN	$9,858,486	82,807	14
6	**Amalie Arena** TAMPA, FLA.	$9,554,516	67,841	5
7	**Madison Square Garden** NEW YORK	$8,912,625	93,787	7
8	**American Airlines Center** DALLAS	$8,380,031	61,108	6
9	**Qudos Bank Arena** SYDNEY	$8,115,223	85,250	7
10	**Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot** SAN JUAN	$7,800,152	116,464	12

Michael Bublé

Backstreet Boys

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Hallenstadion** ZURICH	$8,366,167	72,506	9
2	**Ariake Arena** TOKYO	$4,800,000	32,594	3
3	**RAC Arena** PERTH, AUSTRALIA	$4,443,047	42,539	4
4	**Acrisure Arena** PALM DESERT, CALIF.	$2,788,938	10,470	1
5	**Van Andel Arena** GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	$2,240,875	58,619	10
6	**Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall** ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.	$2,162,167	20,097	3
7	**John Paul Jones Arena** CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.	$1,978,506	18,811	2
8	**OVO Arena Wembley** LONDON	$1,877,169	39,267	8
9	**Indoor Stadium** SINGAPORE	$1,650,000	9,742	1
10	**Osaka-Jo Hall** OSAKA, JAPAN	$1,615,213	10,857	1

Red Hot Chili Peppers

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Dolby Live** LAS VEGAS	$13,130,486	51,359	10
2	**Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** HOLLYWOOD, FLA.	$7,354,781	38,960	7
3	**Auditorio Nacional** MEXICO CITY	$4,722,862	85,743	10
4	**Radio City Music Hall** NEW YORK	$4,686,086	43,173	8
5	**Mohegan Sun Arena** UNCASVILLE, CONN.	$3,823,448	33,514	6
6	**The Anthem** WASHINGTON, D.C.	$2,724,665	28,539	7
7	**Auditorio Citibanamex** MONTERREY, NUEVO LEÓN, MEXICO	$2,709,963	31,211	5
8	**Texas Trust CU Theatre** DALLAS	$2,677,746	37,769	10
9	**1st Bank Center** BROOMFIELD, COLO.	$2,369,879	33,989	5
10	**Auditorio Telmex** ZAPOPAN, JALISCO, MEXICO	$1,628,783	21,440	3

5,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Resorts World Theatre** LAS VEGAS	$6,123,571	43,128	12
2	**Fox Theatre** ATLANTA	$3,732,749	63,377	16
3	**Beacon Theatre** NEW YORK	$3,349,036	37,258	15
4	**David A. Straz Jr. Center for the Performing Arts, Morsani Hall** TAMPA, FLA.	$3,012,434	40,468	19
5	**Ruth Eckerd Hall** CLEARWATER, FLA.	$2,902,610	37,562	22
6	**The Mission Ballroom** DENVER	$2,322,516	47,534	13
7	**Durham Performing Arts Center** DURHAM, N.C.	$1,557,454	24,858	11
8	**Mullett Arena** TEMPE, ARIZ.	$1,541,672	15,434	4
9	**Roadrunner** BOSTON	$1,451,738	18,107	6
10	**Teatro Telcel** MEXICO CITY	$1,322,764	24,503	28

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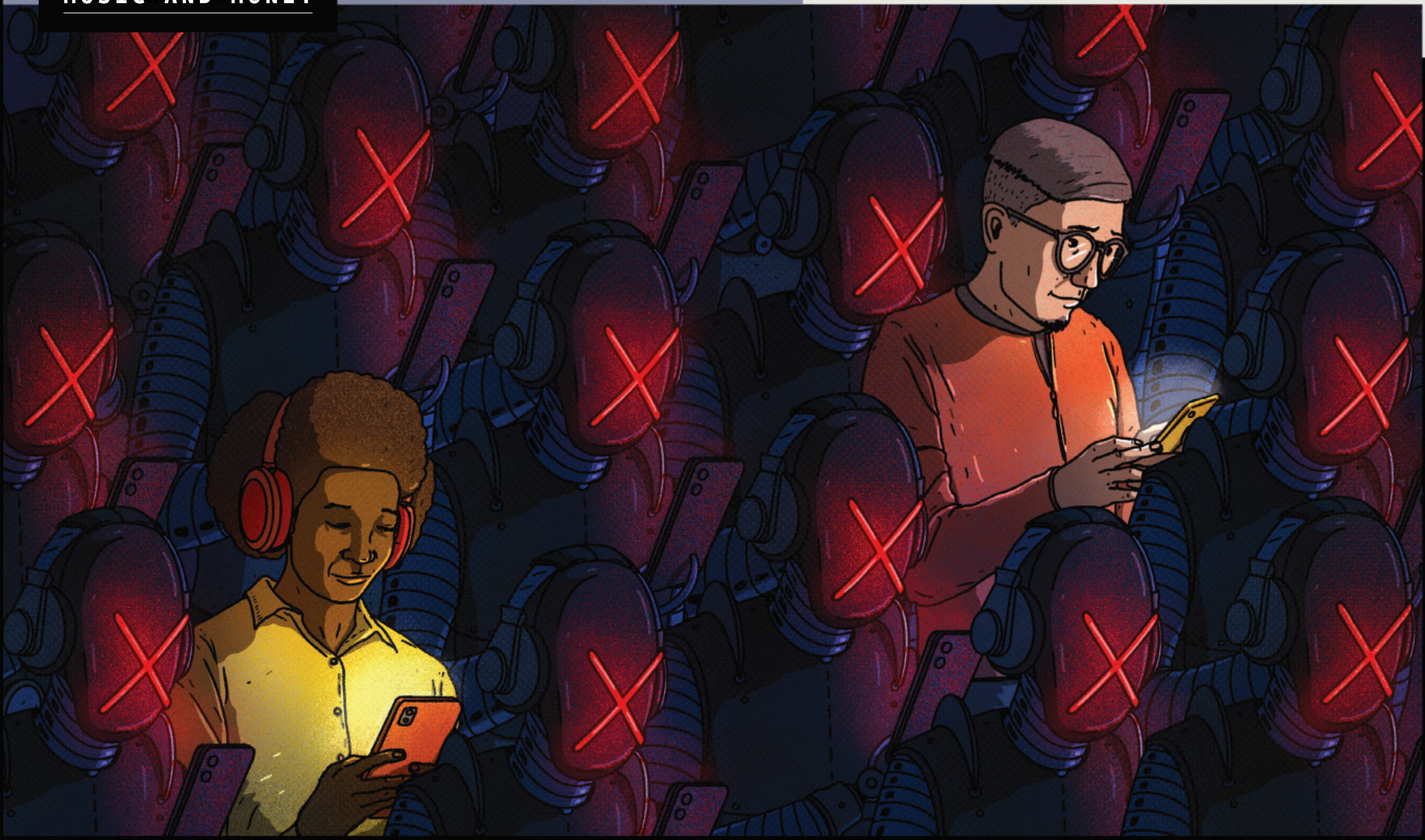
PG. 22 WILL SPOTIFY RAISE SUBSCRIPTION RATES?
PG. 24 CDs STAKE A CLAIM ON THE MERCH TABLE
PG. 28 CITRIN COOPERMAN'S NARI MATSUURA

MUSIC AND MONEY



Fake Streams Are A Real Problem

According to one estimate, more than $1 billion in royalties is lost to streaming fraud worldwide. But the industry has yet to form a united approach to a global problem

BY ELIAS LEIGHT // ILLUSTRATION BY LAURENT HRYBYK

IN MAY 2022, the German Music Industry Association (BVMI) set its sights on “curbing streaming manipulation and streaming fraud.” These issues are “a central concern” for the music business, the organization wrote in a confidential document reviewed by *Billboard*, due to their “distortion of the chart ranking and/or influencing of royalty payments.” As a result, BVMI issued a call for proposals to “establish a ‘Fraud Detection System.’ ”

Related discussions have been taking place around the music industry recently. In January, the French government published what appears to be the first-ever national analysis of streaming fraud. In the United States, the outline of a fraud-mitigation proposal is circulating among several distributors, publishers and streaming platforms, while the annual Music Biz conference in Nashville in May will feature not one but three panels on the topic.

Why all the sudden attention on this issue? The Centre National de la Musique (CNM), an organization that operates under France’s Ministry of Culture, found that 1% to 3% of streams in the country were fraudulent in 2021. If those numbers were to hold true for the worldwide music market — which IFPI valued at $16.9 billion in 2021 — that would mean approximately $170 million to $510 million of streaming royalties are being hijacked globally.

IFPI reported that recorded-music revenue grew 9% to $26.2 billion in 2022.

TikTok CEO **Shou Zi Chew** testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Capitol Hill.

Some think that’s on the low end. The streaming service Deezer has said that 7% of streams on the platform are fraudulent — and that’s just what it identifies. BeatDapp, a Vancouver-based company that builds fraud detection software for labels, distributors and streaming services all over the world, estimates that around 10% of global streams are fraudulent; while some of this activity is caught, that could mean that over $1 billion in royalties ends up in the wrong pockets.

“Nobody’s immune” to streaming fraud, says Christine Barnum, chief revenue officer at the distributor CD Baby. “So people are finally having the realization, ‘Yeah, this is a problem.’ ”

“It’s just very common,” adds one indie-label head who has “definitely bought” streams. “People are really worried about optics — ‘I need to have at least a million streams on a song,’ whatever the bar is that

Taylor Swift kicked off The Eras Tour with back-to-back concerts in Glendale, Ariz.

Post Malone reached a last-minute settlement with a musician who claimed he was not properly credited for co-writing “Circles.”

they’re trying to hit to make it look a certain way. There’s so much pressure.”

“Streaming fraud” is a rangy term that can encompass a variety of behaviors. These include uploading an unauthorized remix of a viral single, boosting play counts by streaming music through a hacked Spotify account or creating a bot network to drive streams to a pop hit (for chart purposes) or a white noise recording (for royalties). (CNM’s study found that 80% of fraud was detected in streaming’s “long tail,” meaning it had little to do with the charts.)

The unifying thread across these activities: They can siphon money from the royalty pool. For most streaming services, dollars from ads and subscriptions are lumped together and then distributed to rights holders according to their share of total plays. “If the demand for certain titles is increased due to streaming manipulation,” BVMI’s document explains, “other rights holders automatically receive lower royalty payments.”

Or, as Barnum puts it, fraud is “ruining it for the genuine artists who deserve to be accurately compensated for their listens. That’s being diluted.”

10%

BeatDapp’s estimate of how many global streams are fraudulent.

Some fraud is similar to old-fashioned music piracy, like uploading an unsanctioned version of an artist’s work to Spotify — or even just a duplicate under an alternate name — and claiming royalties from the resulting streams. With both piracy and fraud, “artists and anyone that makes their living from music have the potential to suffer real economic loss,” says Morgan Hayduk, co-founder/CEO of BeatDapp.

But while piracy in the file-trading and CD-burning era of the 2000s stemmed from “consumer demand for lower costs and more choice,” streaming fraud is “primarily driven by the profit motivations of nonconsumer enterprises seeking to extract revenue from the digital music industry,” Hayduk continues. “They leverage the same tools used for other types of online fraud, like stolen account credentials and bots. This isn’t a consumer-led phenomenon — it’s a reflection of the ease with which digital platforms can be manipulated for specific commercial gain.”

Sure enough, CNM’s report lamented that “fraud seems to be getting easier and easier to commit.” “In the beginning, fraud came mostly from unknown artists trying to get visibility, increased promotion or maybe a record or distribution contract,” says Ludovic Pouilly, senior vp of institutional and music industry relations at Deezer. “Right now, streaming fraud is more sophisticated and increasingly harder to detect, and we can see activity for the music of artists on all levels.” Meaning both that bad actors are diverting streams from major artists and it’s no longer simply unknown artists using bots to get visibility.

Currently, most efforts to combat fraud take place within individual organizations — whether that’s a streaming service or a distributor — which try to detect suspicious activity before it can affect payouts. In addition, IFPI has had some success taking legal action against streaming fraud sites in Germany and Brazil.

But fraud persists, which might be why there’s a growing realization that if the music industry really wants to prevent hundreds of millions of dollars from slipping out a side door, it may need a more comprehensive, cooperative approach. That said, there’s no consensus yet on what that might look like. In a statement to *Billboard*, BVMI said, “We are currently working on a tool to find artificial streams,” calling it a “work in progress.”

Louis Posen, founder of Hopeless Records, is an advocate for third-party oversight. “Currently, security is on a [digital service provider] by DSP level,” he says. “I think we need a monitoring, prevention, detection, mitigation and enforcement system at the level of the financial industry — both a third-party company that can monitor all the services as well as a department at each service with full resources.”

A senior executive at a major label doesn’t agree. “I’d really like to believe it’s not necessary, because it adds cost to the ecosystem,” the executive says. “Between the DSPs, the labels and the distribution side of our business, there are ways to solve this: having strong technology and technology controls, having strong rules and policies [around fraud] and adding consequences when you violate those.”

While the major labels either declined to speak about this issue on the record or did not respond to requests for comment, the senior executive notes that “we have concern over any level of fraud that happens in any of the platforms.” In 2019, the majors were among those that signed a code of conduct condemning streaming fraud, though the document was not legally binding, so it’s hard to tell the extent of its impact.

The disagreement about the best ways to combat fraud were evident in the CNM report. The study was hamstrung by several streaming services — Apple Music, YouTube and Amazon — declining to share information about fraud on their platforms, seemingly content to handle the issue internally. Those three platforms are estimated to account for a little over 35% of global streaming subscriptions; CNM was forced to perform its analysis without a complete view of the French streaming market.

Barnum maintains that “a global problem is going to take a global solution.” For now, she’s at least heartened by the fact that more people are willing to acknowledge streaming fraud’s existence: “I’m no longer a weirdo on the corner saying, ‘I think there’s a problem.’ ”

How To Spoof A Stream

Streaming fraud “covers a multitude of techniques used to increase stream counts or impressions by other than legitimate means,” according to Richard Burgess, president/CEO of the American Association of Independent Music. Here are three.

BOTS

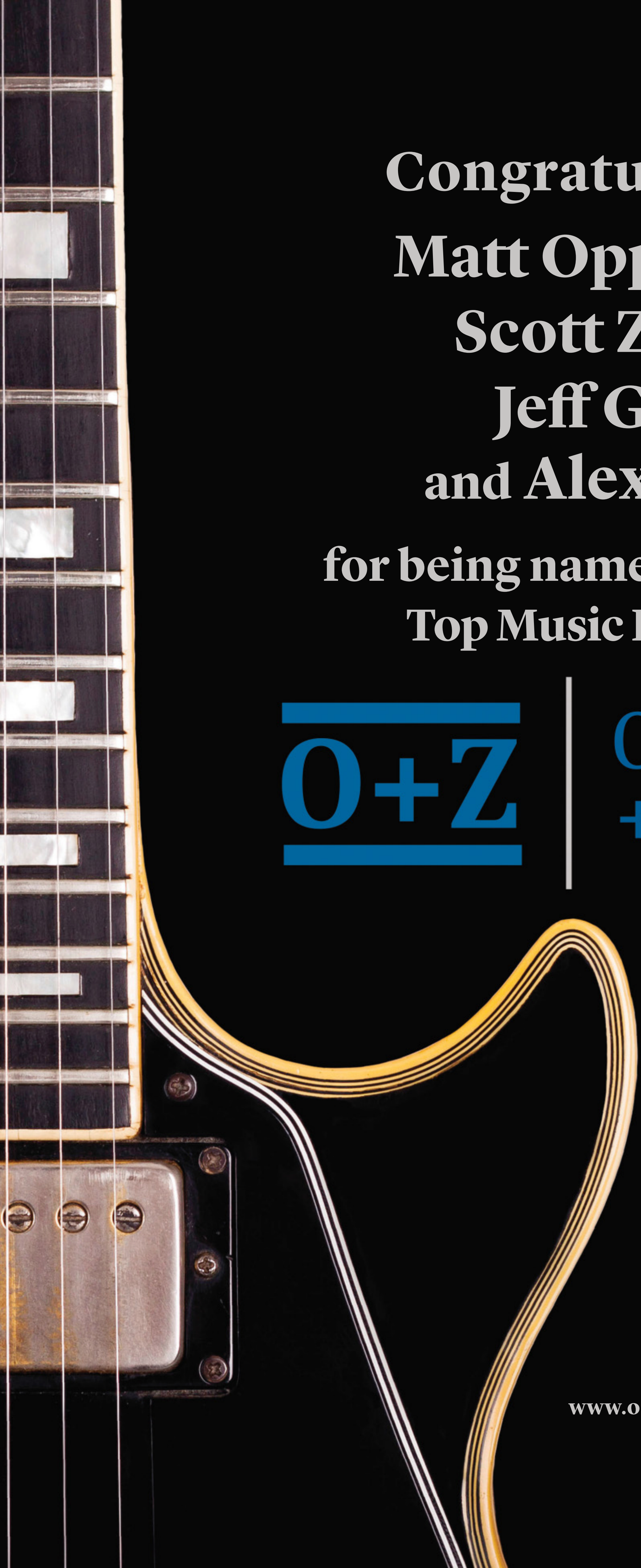
Discussion of streaming fraud often turns quickly to bots, which Burgess defines as “automated software that can be used to generate views, streams or interactions.” To detect bot activity and prevent it from affecting royalty payouts, companies build models that trawl streaming data and look for listening patterns that appear anomalous: BeatDapp likes to discuss an example of finding tens of thousands of accounts all streaming the same 63 songs. “If I’m trying to push numbers up, I’m going to do it across streaming services in a subtle fashion this way,” co-CEO Andrew Batey says. “Spread it across a lot of accounts and multiple platforms, and you can drive a significant number of plays with no one looking.”

CLICK FARMS

Streaming services are looking for suspicious play patterns that don’t reflect human behavior. Fraudsters are aware of this, so they try to camouflage their activity in ways that appear human. One method is to get actual humans to press Play through what are known as “click farms.” Eric Drott, a professor at the University of Texas in Austin who has written about streaming fraud, describes these as “enterprises concentrating low-paid, precarious workers who are engaged to perform the sort of rote, repetitive tasks that keep the flows of digital capitalism moving: creating social media accounts, moderating content for platforms, clicking online ads, liking or rating items and, of course, generating plays on streaming services.” Accounts that stream music 24 hours a day or stem from a smartphone that never moves or dips below 100% power could be evidence of click-farm activity.

IMPOSTERS

A third prominent form of fraud identified by Burgess involves impersonating creators by uploading a version of their song to streaming services and illegally collecting creators’ legitimate royalties. This is a common problem faced by artists who are having a moment on TikTok, for example: Imposters post a version of the TikTok hit on streaming services under a slightly different name, aiming to divert some streams (and hopefully royalties) their way. “It happens to every single viral artist,” says one manager who shepherded a viral act to a major-label deal last year. There are many distribution companies out there, and managers say that some of them have lax oversight of what’s being uploaded to the DSPs through their platforms. This means artists and their teams have to keep close watch on streaming platforms and issue takedowns when they find imposter versions. —E.L.



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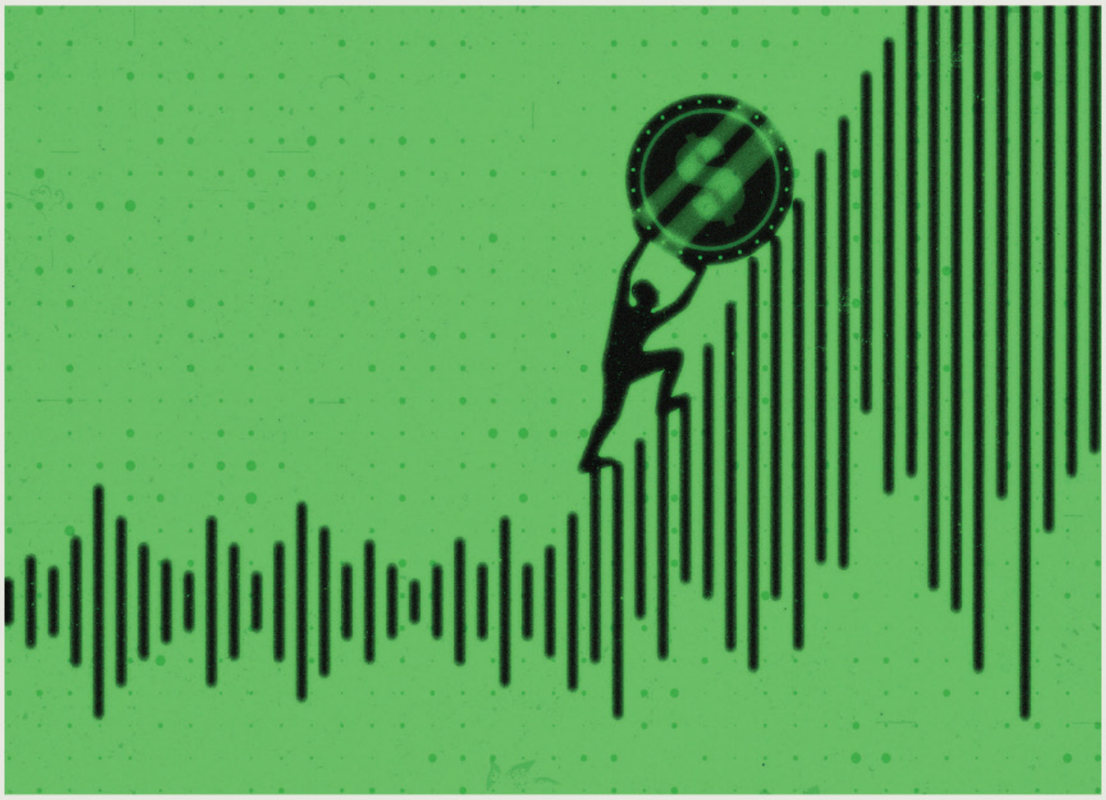
Metallica bought Alexandria, Va.-based pressing plant **Furnace Record Pressing** to serve its vinyl business.

Apple Music announced the launch of a stand-alone classical music app.



THE CASE FOR — AND AGAINST — HIGHER STREAMING SUBSCRIPTION RATES

As the growth of streaming revenue slows, some are looking to Spotify to raise prices

BY GLENN PEOPLES

WITH SOME HIGH-FLYING markets falling to single-digit recorded-music revenue growth in 2022, there are rising expectations that Spotify will follow Apple Music and Amazon Music and raise the price of its individual plans in the United States and other major markets.

Last year, growth in U.S. music subscription revenue fell to 7.2%, down from 22.2% in 2021, according to the RIAA. It was the lowest annual rate since the subscription market grew just 2.9% in 2010 — a year before Spotify launched in the United States and transformed a business that depended on downloads to one ruled by streaming. With subscriptions now accounting for 57.9% of U.S. recorded-music revenue, overall revenue growth slowed to 6.1% from 23.2% the prior year. A similar scene played out in the United Kingdom and France, the world's third- and fifth-largest recorded-music markets, respectively; growth of paid-subscription revenue dropped from 13% to 4.8% in the United Kingdom, according to the BPI, and from 15% to 11.4% in France, according to SNEP, France's record industry trade group.

The sudden slowdown could have a number of causes. Most markets stayed healthy in 2021 as the pandemic boosted music subscription services. But there's increased competition in the attention economy: SNEP suggests TikTok is at least partially responsible for the softer growth. SNEP's 2022 annual report revealed that 77% of 16- to 24-year-olds say they discover a lot of new artists on TikTok, and 45% of this group now spend more time on the app — which is not monetized well — than on music services such as Spotify.

The industry's 2023 revenue will get a boost from price hikes by Apple Music, Amazon Music and Deezer in the United States and other major markets of about $2 on family plans and $1 on individual plans. But the industry could get even more: Spotify, the largest subscription service, raised prices on family plans in the United States in 2021 but has kept the individual plan at $9.99 since the platform launched in the United States in 2011.

Raising rates will create new revenue for rights holders, creators and digital services just as growth is slowing in many major markets. Barclays estimates that a 10% price bump by all subscription services would increase the earnings per share of Universal Music Group by 13% and add 400 million euros ($430 million) of revenue and 240 million euros ($258 million) of gross margin annually. Barclays believes the same price increase would improve Warner Music Group's earnings per share by 21% and add $256 million of revenue and $158 million of gross margin. JPMorgan Chase analysts said in a March 8 report that a Spotify price increase for U.S. individual plans — expected "in the coming months" — would create incremental annual revenue of about $200 million.

$430M

Estimated boost to UMG's revenue if subscription services raise prices 10%.

WMG CEO Robert Kyncl, a former YouTube executive, pointed out at a Morgan Stanley conference on March 8 that the price of YouTube TV doubled "because they have a superior product," while music subscription prices have barely budged. "That doesn't seem right," he said. "I'm amazed we're paying the same today as we did for Rhapsody in 2003," says MusicWatch managing partner Russ Crupnick about one of the first music subscription products. Rhapsody cost $9.95 per month in 2003. Adjusted for inflation, that's equal to $16.25 today — 63% above what Spotify is charging and 48% more than Amazon Music and Apple Music's recently increased individual rates. After Rhapsody, most on-demand subscription services adhered to the $9.99 monthly fee: Sony's Music Unlimited, Rdio, SoundCloud Go, Pandora Premium and Spotify, among others. One notable exception was Microsoft's Zune, which launched in 2006 at $14.99 per month.

Spotify, for its part, seems confident its product could withstand a broad price increase. "We obviously know our competitors have raised prices, and we think we have a better product than most of our competitors," Spotify CFO Paul Vogel said at the Morgan Stanley conference. "So if our competitors are able to raise prices, and we think we have the best product in the business, it obviously bodes well for our ability over time for pricing."

But Spotify takes the stance that keeping rates low is good for business. As CEO Daniel Ek explained in a Jan. 31 earnings call, Spotify has two strategies to choose from: grow the number of subscribers or increase the revenue per subscriber. Generally, "our approach when we're early in a market is to try to grow the number of participants" by maintaining "a competitive price," Ek said. Over time, he added, more of the revenue growth "comes from price increases" as the market matures. But because it operates in 184 markets, Spotify doesn't have a single approach. "In some markets," Ek said, "we're mostly focused on growth."

In a healthy economy, music services appeared flat-footed, while on-demand streaming video services seemed to be making the right decisions: They had differentiated services that attracted subscribers with exclusive content and raised prices as consumer demand strengthened. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic was a boom for streaming services. Suddenly, people had more time to stay at home, and they spent much of it online. Netflix subscriptions ballooned 27.3% in the second half of 2020. Also that year, the company raised the price of its standard U.S. plan by $1 to $13.99. In 2022, it went up $1.50 to $15.49.

Spotify may have been fortunate not to raise its standard plan prices. In the wake of global supply chain problems and persistent inflation, consumers are increasingly price-sensitive. In the short term, Spotify could have bought itself some goodwill. "It can make a case that it's helping consumers through a downturn," says MIDiA Research's Mark Mulligan. Over the long term, however, music subscription services' unwillingness to raise their rates could put them at a disadvantage to their video peers. "Basically, streaming music waited so long to change prices," says Mulligan, that "a whole generation expects these prices." ▣

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD MIA

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Bandcamp employees filed with the National Labor Relations Board to authorize a union election.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission charged **Lindsay Lohan**, **Lil Yachty**, **Soulja Boy** and other celebrities with "illegally touting" crypto.

Merch Tables Give CDs A New Spin

The digital discs are more portable and economical than vinyl albums and less subject to manufacturing delays, which could be why sales are slightly up so far this year

BY STEVE KNOPPER

ON MARCH 4, hundreds of metalheads stormed into Pierce the Veil's pop-up store in Glendale, Calif., scooping up T-shirts, hoodies and other merchandise. In the process, they helped boost sales for an ostensibly dying product: compact discs. "Kids would look at the display and pick every single one of our records on CD," says Michele Abreim, the band's manager. "It definitely felt like CDs were a merch item, not just a means to listen to music."

A relic of the record industry's pre-Napster boom period thanks to megastars like *NSYNC, Britney Spears and Eminem, U.S. CD sales accounted for $13.2 billion in 2000, their peak year, according to the RIAA. But though the format has been in steady decline throughout the streaming era, retail, manufacturing and management sources say the digital discs have gained in popularity as keepsakes. More portable than vinyl albums and less affected by manufacturing delays due to supply chain issues, CDs are once again becoming merch table mainstays, and in the first 10 weeks of 2023, sales are up slightly over the same period last year, according to Luminate — 6.8 million in 2022 to 6.9 million, a 2.5% increase.

This growth could be a sign of a growing coolness factor, similar to the unexpected, and sustained, vinyl revival in the early 2000s, which is fueled by limited-edition releases pressed on colored vinyl and other bells and whistles. Taylor Swift took a page from that playbook when she put out *Midnights* CDs in different collectible colors last year, and Blackpink is among the many K-pop acts to sell elaborate CD box sets.

"There are ways to do CDs that are incredibly impactful," says Carl Mello, brand engagement director for Newbury Comics. "You can get more revenue out of it, so it's not like a 'Will this do $7.99?' thing. You're selling a $30 thing that a customer will be really happy with."

Bill Wilson, senior vp of operations and innovation for MNRK Music Group, which oversees 50 independent labels, says specialized CD-buying audiences are keeping the format afloat. "There are still pockets and subgenres of music [fans] — like metal — who like holding and cuddling CDs — and they're not vinyl collectors," he says.

For those who can't afford box sets or to spend upwards of $20 for a standard-issue vinyl album, "the CD is a much more budget-friendly item," says Tony van Veen, CEO of New Jersey-based vinyl/CD manufacturer Disc Makers, who crunched the latest RIAA sales data and found that vinyl album prices rose last year by 13.5%, to $29.65, while CD prices went up 15.3%, to $14.45. "Music fans are deciding with their wallets." He adds that his company CD sales stabilized in 2022 after years of decline.

CDs are generally far cheaper than vinyl albums — especially classic-rock catalog releases, which labels occasionally put on sale in the format. Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Chronicle: The 20 Greatest Hits* goes for $13.99 on Amazon, compared with $28.31 for vinyl; a Foo Fighters *Greatest Hits* CD sells for $11.49, slightly more than half the $21.91 vinyl price.

Although pandemic-related manufacturing delays for vinyl are easing, they have prompted touring acts to stock their merch tables with CDs. "I had a conversation with somebody yesterday, and they're about to go on tour," says Ric Sherman, owner of The Production Department, a consulting company that works with artists, labels and record plants. "Trying to get vinyl on time was impossible, and they defaulted to CDs immediately."

The profit margin for vinyl albums is slightly higher than CDs — a $15 CD would yield roughly $13.50 in profit; a $30 vinyl album, $15 — but Sherman adds: "Vinyl's expensive to manufacture." According to van Veen, 100 CDs cost $150 to manufacture, compared with $1,500 for 100 vinyl albums.

"If artists are touring, it's easier to cart those around than vinyl," says Mello. "There are utilities to it, for sure."

Despite the small sales uptick so far in 2023, the 20-year decline in CD sales shows no sign of dissipating: Sales dropped from 40.6 million units in 2021 to 35.9 million last year, an 11.6% decrease, compared with a 4.2% rise in 2022 vinyl sales, according to Luminate. (That said, vinyl's sales growth has slowed considerably from the 51% increase it logged in 2021.) Major labels are also reluctant to bet on CDs to drive significant revenue in the future. Says a major-label source: "I haven't heard of the idea that somebody's so committed to buying a physical product that they're just going to move over to the CD if they can't get a vinyl product."

Then again, 35.9 million in annual sales is not nothing, and CDs will probably be around for a long time. "They're highly valued and sought-after," Mello says. ◘

6.9M

CD sales for the first 10 weeks of 2023, an unexpected 2.5% increase over the 6.8 million sold in the same period last year.

PIERCE: COURTESY OF FEARLESS RECORDS. BLACKPINK: COURTESY OF YG ENTERTAINMENT. DEFTONES: COURTESY OF REPRISE RECORDS. EMINEM: COURTESY OF INTERSCOPE RECORDS. SWIFT: COURTESY OF REPUBLIC RECORDS. CREEDENCE: COURTESY OF FANTASY RECORDS.

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INDIA DRIVES SPOTIFY'S GLOBAL GROWTH

Will revenue follow? With 10 billion streams in January alone, Spotify has become the country's leader in monthly streams, but India is still not a top five revenue market for the service **BY AMIT GURBAXANI**

MUMBAI, INDIA — India is driving Spotify's international expansion, vaulting into the top five territories in total users for the platform after just four years of operation in the country.

"India is the single market that has contributed the most to our global growth over the last year," says Gustav Gyllenhammar, Spotify's vp of markets and subscriber growth. The company's user count in India has tripled over the last two years, according to Gyllenhammar. Spotify did not provide numbers, but Comscore estimates the platform has about 55 million monthly active users (MAUs) in India, and Spotify is the country's top audio-streaming service in terms of engagement, with nearly 10 billion tracks streamed in India in January alone, sources close to the company say.

Despite this, India is not a top five revenue market for the service, Gyllenhammar says, demonstrating the limits of the country — which has 1.4 billion people and is expected to soon pass China as the most populous nation — as a music market. Multiple factors are at play, including India's significantly lower per-stream payouts, a resistance to paying for music subscriptions and the challenges of a market with two official languages and another 22 regional ones.

India was the 17th-largest recorded-music market in 2021, with $219 million in revenue, up 20% from 2020, driven largely by streaming, according to IFPI's Global Music Report. But at just $0.16, its per-capita music revenue is among the lowest in the world. India's economy is one of the world's largest, but a 2022 report by the International Monetary Fund ranks its per-capita income 140 out of 190 countries, which contributes to the problems streaming services have getting more consumers to pay for subscriptions. A monthly Spotify subscription costs 119 rupees ($1.45) compared with $9.99 in the United States. Gyllenhammar says the service doesn't plan to increase prices in India in the near future.

India's streaming market is estimated to have over 300 million MAUs. (For comparison, there are 219 million in the United States.) When Spotify launched there in 2019, it was the eighth major audio-streaming service to enter a market ruled by local streaming services Gaana, JioSaavn and Wynk. Since then, it has overtaken Gaana, and though JioSaavn and Wynk still have more MAUs than Spotify, 20.1% of respondents picked Spotify as their favorite music streaming service, compared with 4.9% who chose either JioSaavn or Wynk, in a study conducted last year by IFPI and the Indian Music Industry, the country's recorded-music trade group. (YouTube topped the list with 46%.)

Indian music executives say Spotify has better technology for generating algorithmic recommendations and playlist personalization — and that gives it an edge over domestic rivals. It also emulated its local competition by emphasizing the importance of regional-language music and by creating a generous ad-based tier.

In India, Spotify offers a mobile-only "mini" subscription where users pay 7 rupees ($0.09) per day. It offers ad-free music on phones, group listening sessions and downloads of 30 songs per device. There aren't any restrictions on the number of songs free users can stream in the ad-based tier.

Today, in addition to English, Spotify offers its service in 12 Indian languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu. To focus on local languages, Spotify has had to customize its operations. "Until we came to India, most [of our] markets [were dominated by] one or two languages," says Amarjit Singh Batra, GM/managing director for India. "The whole structure, from the teams to the way we work to how we look at recommendations, curation — every piece had to be re-looked at."

Local content accounts for about 85% of listening on domestic platforms like JioSaavn and Wynk, for example, but initially only made up 20% to 30% of Spotify streams in the market. "When we launched, consumption looked very similar to many other countries globally, [which is] predominantly international English-language music," Gyllenhammar says. Then Spotify pushed to expand its audience beyond India's big cities, and today, out of Spotify's 184 markets, India has the highest share of local consumption, at 70%.

During the pandemic, as competitors tightened their budgets, the Swedish company says it spent heavily on nationwide and region-specific advertising and marketing — including ads on broadcast and streaming TV. "We have never paid so much attention to marketing in any single market," says Gyllenhammar. The platform has run marketing campaigns in Hindi and English, as well as the four main languages spoken in south India: Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

While India is primarily a low-price, high-volume play for Spotify, the country offers tremendous growth potential. It has the second-largest share of internet and smartphone users in the world (after China), at about 658 million, but that's just under half of its total population. (The United States and the United Kingdom both have 90% internet penetration.) "If you look at other sectors online, whether it's in search or social media or e-commerce, [India is] a billion-dollar market for the global players," Gyllenhammar says.

Singh Batra says Spotify's focus over the next four years will be on reaching "a level where the audience for each and every core [Indian] language is able to say, 'Spotify is for me, for my region.' " By focusing on regional-language listeners, Spotify aims to gain new consumers in smaller cities and rural areas, as well as by pulling customers from JioSaavn and Resso, which dominate those regions.

The company says it's gaining subscribers in India at a faster rate than total users. In 2022, premium subscriptions grew by 85% and MAUs by 80% year on year. Spotify executives say they see India following the same growth path as Latin America, where the level of paid users is now about the same as the global average of 40%.

It took eight years after Spotify launched in Brazil in 2014 for the region to reach that 40% level, Gyllenhammar says. "It didn't happen in the first four years," he observes. "It happened during the second phase of those eight years. So similarly, for India, the next four years is a period where we will see improvement on this side."

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW HANCOCK

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PHOTO BY OTHELLO BANACI

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RIAA FOR MUSIC

Former Apple Music global creative director **Larry Jackson** launched **Gamma**, a one-stop-shop media company.

Warner Music Group CFO **Eric Levin** announced he will retire at the end of 2023.

Matsuura photographed Feb. 20 at Citrin Cooperman in New York.

From The Desk Of... Nari Matsuura

PARTNER/CO-LEADER, MUSIC ECONOMICS AND VALUATION SERVICES PRACTICE, CITRIN COOPERMAN

BY ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY REBECCA SMEYNE

WHEN IT comes to the red-hot market for music rights, the only people who may be more important than the buyers and sellers are number crunchers like Nari Matsuura.

The Ottawa, Ontario, native is the partner of Barry Massarsky and founder of the valuation division of their music economics and valuation services practice at Citrin Cooperman, one of just a handful of firms that calculate the future growth rates and discounts essential to determining a music catalog's market value.

From 2021 to 2022, Matsuura estimates she oversaw 750 catalog valuations totaling $15.5 billion for such clients as Hipgnosis Songs Fund, Primary Wave and Reservoir Media.

But as billions have flooded the music intellectual property market, the practice of valuing catalogs has encountered unexpected controversy, with Massarsky and Matsuura's team occasionally in the middle. Banks put considerable weight on catalog valuations when determining how much to lend to a buyer, and some question whether Citrin Cooperman's discount rate — which has not budged since spring 2022 — ignores macroeconomic pressures, such as the rising cost to borrow, that could affect valuations. Lower valuations could lead banks to decrease the amounts they lend overall, which could have a cooling effect on the market. "The reason we did not increase our discount rate along with the rising interest rate environment is because we had originally started at a higher discount rate so that we could accommodate for that rise," Matsuura says. "We knew that this low interest rate environment was not sustainable in the long term."

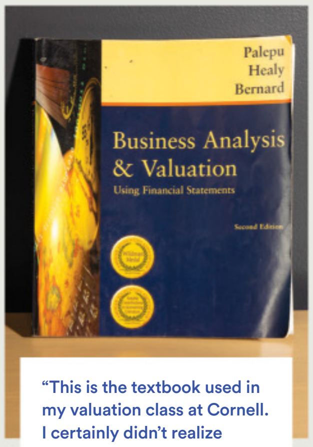
Matsuura says she's confident that she and her team are "doing a credible and responsible job." Her solemn, studious demeanor suggests that she is unruffled by the pressures of her work — perhaps the byproduct of her past as a concert pianist. Matsuura attended The Juilliard School in Manhattan from the age of 15 and spent her 20s performing concerts and solo chamber music across North America and Asia before pivoting to the financial side of the industry she loved. "There was something about quantifying the abstract — the future — that appealed to me," she says.

After graduating from Cornell University's SC Johnson College of Business in 2001, fellow Cornell alumnus Massarsky recruited Matsuura to join what was then the one-man firm of Massarsky Consulting. The two sold the firm to Citrin Cooperman in 2022 and are now growing its team of analysts to accommodate the increasing demand for their services.

Eliah Seton was named CEO of **SoundCloud**.

SiriusXM laid off 475 employees, or 8% of its workforce, as it looked to reduce expenses and invest in new technology.

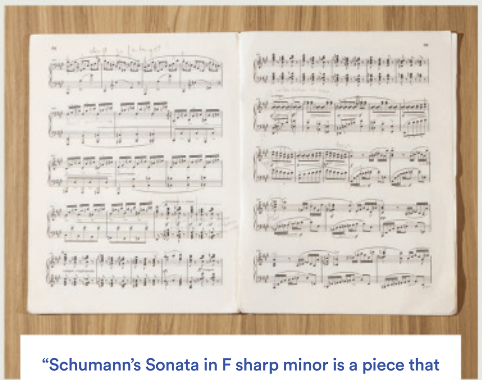
“My daughter likes to do origami, and these really brighten up the office,” Matsuura says.



“This is the textbook used in my valuation class at Cornell. I certainly didn’t realize then how important what I learned would be.”

KING CRIMSON EPITAPH

A copy of King Crimson’s 1997 *Epitaph* album “signed by the original members of the band. It contains live performances of the 1969 progressive rock album *In the Court of the Crimson King*, which is one of my favorites.”



“Schumann’s Sonata in F sharp minor is a piece that I used to perform a lot as a concert pianist. It is one of my favorite pieces in the piano repertoire.”

“There were many early signals that valuation would become an important expertise in this industry,” Matsuura says. “Clients were already asking us to do valuations of smaller assets such as music libraries. We did not know at the time that the investment market would become so big.”

Why is independence so important to your job?
Our job is to provide the market value of a catalog or portfolio of catalogs, and being independent is critical to achieving that. Capital is raised based on the values of these assets, and there needs to be confidence that the valuation was arrived at independently in order to do so. A few of the ways in which we achieve that independence are one, being consistent in our methodology across all of the funds, including the application of growth rates, and two, solving for the market value, not for an individual fund’s purchasing ability based on their hurdle rate [the individual investor’s rate of return].

What factors do you consider when valuing a catalog?
Our job is to determine the market value of a given music catalog using different inputs that go into a valuation model. One of them is the discount rate, but the majority of inputs that go into developing the model are actually growth rates. How the music industry is performing across different income streams — and it’s performing very strongly — is another consideration.

What role does the discount rate play in the process?
From a discounted cash-flow perspective, future cash flows are discounted to the present value. The present value represents the value of the catalog. The discount rate represents the return on your investment, essentially.

How do you calculate the discount rate?
The essential method is the weighted average cost of capital, [about] which we’ve refined our thinking over time. We factor in an equity-risk premium, a beta [the measure of an asset’s volatility in relation to the overall stock market] of 0.65%. So, what would the risk-free rate — which is probably best represented by the 10-year U.S. Treasury bond — need to be to potentially raise or change the discount rate of 8.5%? Our view based on the numbers is that there is still margin before a change can be considered.

How much margin?
I’ve described some of the inputs, but they aren’t fixed in stone. That’s one reason why it’s difficult to say, “This is the number.” There are two schools of thought on when to change the discount rate. The first is if the risk-free rate is high enough to suggest that that margin has been eroded. The other school of thought is that you should change the discount rate not based on small fluctuations in the risk-free rate or fluctuations in where it will peak, but rather based on where it will eventually land in the long term. We’re talking about a long-lived asset.

When you say “long term,” what kind of time period do you have in mind?
We do a 15-year projection, but the actual asset is 95 years after the death of the composer. Thinking about where this rate is going to land in the long term makes more sense [for calculating] the discount rate. The question is how and when to make that determination — that crystal ball. We are attentive to the risk-free rate and to the possibility of changing that rate. But it would be hard to be beholden to an exact number.

What debt-to-equity profiles do you consider in your calculations?
Our mandate is really to solve for the market and, to the best of our ability, come up with the market value of an asset. We can’t take into account the capital structure or debt-to-equity profile of any given acquirer because that would just be solving for their purchase price, and that wouldn’t necessarily represent market value. So we use a 50-50 ratio to represent an overall industry capital structure ratio in our valuations. And we use that repeatedly.

What are you seeing in terms of multiples? From *Billboard*’s estimates, it appears that superstar catalogs these days get around 20 times-plus multiples, while most others fall below that.
Multiples are tricky, and should not be used to price a catalog. There are always unique aspects to each catalog that can’t be captured in a multiple. Standards catalogs — older catalogs — are getting on average 20-plus multiples because they have stood the test of time.

Have you observed bias in the music asset investment marketplace in the form of preference for certain genres? If so, what effect has that had on sales or asset valuations?
I don’t know that I have observed bias. What I can definitely say is that all of the funds have excellent investment teams that conduct thorough due diligence and carefully develop their own models. What I can also observe is that transactions are taking place across a wider range of genres compared [with], say, five years ago. Investors are open to investing in many different types of music. Although this may be a result of more competitors in the market, which has led to exploring more thoroughly all the different types of music that can be potentially acquired.

How much does success on TikTok affect a catalog’s value? How do you forecast royalties from that kind of source?
TikTok can impact the value of a catalog in different ways. It may raise the overall value on a long-term basis — for example, the effect of [viral videos featuring] “Dreams” on Fleetwood Mac’s catalog — or it may have a more temporary effect. The way we forecast royalties from TikTok is by using comps — that is, TikTok spikes from similar titles and artists — and we’ll also consider whether there may be momentum following the spike that could generate additional value to the song or even catalog.

If Spotify raises its subscription price later this year in the current inflationary market, how would that affect the economics for digital service providers and rights holders?
Music is a relatively price-inelastic product whose business model essentially reversed itself, from a CD model of $18 for 18 tracks, or $1 per track, to the streaming model — which, at $10 per month for unlimited listening of an unlimited number of tracks, is effectively a marginal cost of zero for each additional track. This is so reasonable that consumers are less price sensitive to it than other goods, and an increase in the subscription price should for the most part lead directly to additional revenue for the DSPs and rights holders.

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‘I Hate Living In Fear’

Daniel Caesar is boldly making the major-label leap — while doubling down on R&B innovation

BY NEENA ROUHANI

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LEA WINKLER

Caesar photographed March 16 in New York.

DANIEL CAESAR holds himself to a predictable and impossible standard: “Perfection,” he says.

It explains the title of his upcoming third album, *Never Enough* (out April 7), which is the Toronto native’s first release since signing with Republic Records two years ago. It will also usher in a new, more alternative sonic chapter for the 27-year-old singer-songwriter. “If I was a punk artist, then I would want to be something else,” he says. “It’s really just not wanting to be boxed into anything.”

When Caesar entered the industry with his 2017 debut, *Freudian*, the album positioned him as R&B’s burgeoning golden child from north of the border. *Freudian* landed two singles on the Billboard Hot 100: “Get You,” featuring Kali Uchis and “Best Part,” alongside H.E.R. The latter — one of three Adult R&B Airplay chart-toppers for Caesar — earned him a Grammy Award for best R&B performance.

By year’s end, he landed two songs on former President Barack Obama’s favorite tracks of the year list. Perhaps most impressively, Caesar did it all as an independent artist working alongside a tight-knit team of fellow Canadian creatives and close friends. Together, they founded Golden Child Recordings after attending a handful of label meetings and realizing they already had all the resources to succeed. “The music was making some money, so we just kept reinvesting in ourselves,” says Caesar. “I’d never made any sort of music without them. It was everything I knew.”

But *Freudian*’s follow-up, 2019’s *Case Study 01*, struggled to replicate its predecessor’s success after Caesar shared controversial opinions on race relations on Twitter and Instagram Live. During one particular livestream, where he said he was drunk, Caesar questioned why the Black community was being “mean” to white people, saying, “That’s not equality.”

The subsequent backlash took him by surprise, and Caesar says he underestimated the reach of his opinions. “I understand why it happened. I understood it then as well. I’m just so combative, and I didn’t think that I was wrong,” he admits today. “I was trying to move through the world [according to] how I think it should be and not how it is.”

Less than a year later, as the pandemic hit, Caesar took refuge at the “middle-of-nowhere” 36-acre farm he had bought his parents, located in a town two hours outside of Toronto. It was there that the Bajan-Jamaican artist began reconciling the last few years of his come-up — and contemplating how to advance his career.

Like many, Caesar maintained sanity by picking up quarantine hobbies, such as chess and studying Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*. He also went back to work: In 2021, he scored a Hot 100 No. 1 for his feature on Justin Bieber’s smash “Peaches” (alongside Giveon), and last year, he featured on Omar Apollo’s “Invincible.”

At the same time, he was focused on *Never Enough*. Unlike the star-studded *Case Study 01*, Caesar returned to what he knows best: working with Toronto collaborators like badbadnotgood, Jordan Evans, Matthew Burnett, Sean Leon and even his little brother, Zachary Simmonds, who co-wrote and co-produced “Valentina.” He says he initially felt anxious leading up to its release, but found reassurance in remembering why he makes music in the first place. “For me,” he declares, “it’s literally just to get these feelings off my chest. To make *myself* proud.”

The album centers the introspective bars, soothing blend of woozy guitar and hypnotic harmonies fans have come to expect from Caesar, with hints of cross-genre influences. At Republic, he has even more resources to continue transforming the R&B space.

“I was finding it hard at Golden Child to be a record exec and an artist at the same time,” he says. “This was something I needed to do for myself for my development. I was like, ‘If I don’t do it, it’s because I’m scared.’ And I hate living in fear.”

Caesar met with eight or nine labels, saying he considered Columbia and Warner before signing with Republic. “Republic was actually the label where I said, ‘I would never go there,’ ” he recalls. “It’s just such a big label. They have all the biggest acts. I would be the least important person there.” But after meeting with label founder/CEO Monte Lipman and then-senior vice president of A&R Julian Swirsky, it became clear the label’s help would allow him to do exactly what he wanted: focus on his craft — and his fans. “I felt for a while, especially over [the pandemic], like I didn’t have a relationship with them, or it was severely fickle,” he says.

To reconnect, he met fans where they were: from the favelas of Brazil during Carnival (a country where he realized he has a large listenership) to his newly launched Discord channel (“It’s some Gen Z shit for real,” he jokes). He’ll celebrate the album’s release by kicking off his intimate North American and European underplay tour, One Night Only: An Evening With Daniel Caesar, which will begin April 7 in Los Angeles.

For Caesar, *Never Enough* chronicles his path to becoming his own man while finding a balance between longtime trusted collaborators and welcoming well-established executives into the mix. “I always tell people, ‘I don’t believe in God. I believe in myself and the people around me that I love,’ ” he says. “I believe in our capabilities.”

RBD

Monetizing Memories

Mexican pop band RBD, which scored five top 10 hits on the Hot Latin Songs chart in the early 2000s, performed its last show in 2008, during which the act announced it was disbanding. Its members — Anahí, Dulce María, Christian Chávez, Maite Perroni and Christopher von Uckermann — haven’t stepped onstage together since. And yet, when RBD recently announced it was reuniting for 40-plus shows in arenas and stadiums around the world, dubbed the Soy Rebelde Tour, over 1.5 million tickets were sold in just 24 hours, according to RBD’s manager, Guillermo Rosas.

The Soy Rebelde trek is the latest in a string of Latin reunion tours that are raking in millions of dollars. The trend started in 2020 when *bachata* supergroup Aventura reunited after 10 years for its Inmortal Tour. Its first leg posted $24 million after 14 shows, according to Billboard Boxscore. And in 2021, iconic ’80s Mexican *grupero* band Los Bukis reunited after 25 years for its own stadium run; the nine-date stint entered at No. 6 on *Billboard*’s Top Tours of 2021, with a gross of nearly $50 million.

“What makes these nostalgic touring concepts powerful is that it’s multigenerational,” says Hans Schafer, senior vp of global touring at Live Nation, the promoter behind RBD’s upcoming outing. In 2006, RBD — conceptualized from the Mexican telenovela *Rebelde* — had the No. 1 Latin tour, with a gross of nearly $31 million across 51 shows. “The music has been passed down generations and continues to live on. Now we are seeing more artists interested and excited to tap into the nostalgia of fans.”

But, as Rosas notes, it’s also risky, considering the uncertainty in booking acts that haven’t toured in decades and don’t have massive streaming numbers. “Just because you have 50 million listeners doesn’t mean you’re going to sell 1.5 million tickets at the box office,” he says. “It takes a lot more than streams to become a part of culture.”

Bésame Mucho (similar to the nostalgia-fueled When We Were Young festival) in Los Angeles is proof of exactly that. In December, Los Bukis will headline the fest’s second edition. The 2022 inaugural version of the event sold out in 12 minutes when the 2000s-inspired lineup, which included Juanes, Hombres G and Los Tigres Del Norte, was announced.

“We focused only on what the fans wanted to see and not what was playing on radio,” says John Frias, producer of Bésame Mucho and president of Frias Entertainment. “It was a smash.” —GRISELDA FLORES

GROOMING BY LAURA COSTA USING BALMAIN HAIR COUTURE AT EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS. RBD: TH6.

Fishback as Dre in *Swarm*.

INSIDE LOOK

A Whole Lot Of Buzz

How Donald Glover's new show, *Swarm*, became spring's breakout streaming hit

BY NACEY WATSON JOHNSON

LIKE MANY STANS of music superstars, Dre's devotion to her favorite artist, Ni'Jah, is boundless. She'll battle internet trolls and haters, and max out credit cards for stage-side concert tickets. She lives and breathes her adoration — and, as it turns out, will kill for it, too.

Dre is a fictional character (Ni'Jah, too — though she bears a more than passing resemblance to Beyoncé). But as portrayed by Dominique Fishback in *Swarm*, the Amazon Prime series from co-creators Donald Glover and Janine Nabers that premiered March 17, Dre feels unsettlingly real. And the world of *Swarm* is a genre-mash of eerie, unexpected and playful thrills.

Swarm comes four months after the conclusion of Glover's widely beloved FX series *Atlanta* — but he and Nabers, the series' showrunner, began working on it much earlier. "He called me and was like, 'I really want this to be the first show that has my name on it with yours after *Atlanta*,' " recalls Nabers, a writer-producer on the third and fourth seasons of *Atlanta*.

A character study at its core, *Swarm* feels like a darker sister to *Atlanta*. Every detail is purposefully chosen — from the years in which the show is set (2016-2018, when Twitter and Instagram were firmly established) to its tongue-in-cheek references to real-world events and individuals. (Ni'Jah's fan base, the titular Swarm, is a BeyHive by another name.)

The casting choices, too, are intentional. Musician-actors including Chloe Bailey, Paris Jackson and Billie Eilish were selected in part because they, as Nabers puts it, "have their own swarm of people around them." The most important casting choice of all, of course, was who would play Dre.

"Presence was really important," says Fishback, a standout in shows like *The Deuce* and *Show Me a Hero*, and films such as *Judas and the Black Messiah*. "It became a thing where I would do something really weird, and I would try to get a reaction out of Donald. If I could get him to be like, 'Huh, that was strange,' then I was doing something."

Nabers considers Dre "very much an alien in any situation she's put in." Nonetheless, the show also hinges on the character's existence as just one member of a much larger whole. And Dre's relationship to music is what's supposed to resonate with audiences the most. "That was a very strong way in which we wanted to lead the audience into this character," Nabers says. "The language [Dre] speaks is this star's mythology."

Glover, who wrote and produced on several fictional Ni'Jah songs (sung by KIRBY; seven of them — including one on which Glover features as Childish Gambino — are on the recently released *Swarm* EP from RCA), stitches that music into *Swarm* with a deft hand. Ni'Jah's presence enraptures and haunts Dre, but we only get glimpses of the icon herself — another intentional choice, Nabers explains. "For us, it was really about finding the feeling that someone gives to Black women in America," she says. "If you ask [Black women] who is the representation of them in the words of music and song and unapologetic Black girl realness, everyone's going to have different answers. It's really about allowing us to see that Ni'Jah is that person for Dre."

That lens is new territory for Glover, who has been critiqued in the past for seeming hostile to Black women's perspectives in his work. On *Swarm*, Dre's singular viewpoint is overwhelmingly the one the audience must take — and Fishback's performance is all-consuming.

"You can have a swarm in any kind of way. Swarming thoughts that get into your mind…" Fishback says. "Yes, it's about this girl who is part of this 'swarm.' But we also hope that people watch it and swarm to the project because we can dialogue. It can be about the human condition." **b**

Fishback (left) and Glover on set.

SWARM: COURTESY OF PRIME VIDEO. GLOVER: WARRICK PAGE. WAFFLES: @UNCLESMITH.

ONE TO WATCH

Uncle Waffles

FROM Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland)

AGE 22

LABEL n/a

FOUNDATION While interning at a local Eswatini TV station in 2020, Lungelihle Zwane stumbled upon 15-year-old DJ decks, which a DJ who often visited the office then taught her to use. Having grown up on South African house and *kwaito* acts like Black Coffee, Lebo Mathosa and DJ Kent, Zwane studied the rising *amapiano* movement — a South African subgenre of house and piano-led jazz — that was hitting clubs right before lockdown. Using it as inspiration, she practiced DJ'ing eight hours a day during the pandemic. "This makes me feel the way I've always thought my purpose would make me feel," she says. "It made me feel whole." Zwane's high school friends picked out the stage name Uncle Waffles because, as she reasoned, "nobody's going to expect it."

DISCOVERY Creative agency Kreative Kornerr helped Zwane break into South Africa's heavily saturated music industry by booking her regular gigs, one of which she says "changed my life." In October 2021, a DJ bailed on the prime 10:30 p.m. slot at Zone 6 Venue, and she filled in. "I've never played for that many people," Zwane recalls. The performance reached an even larger audience when a 30-second Instagram video of Zwane whining her hips to Young Stunna's "Adiwele" went viral. "[The song] says, 'Coming at them with force,' which is what happened to my life after that." Zwane headlined her first African and U.K. tours in 2021 and 2022, respectively; received a Drake co-sign; and independently released her fiery debut single, "Tanzania," in March 2022, ahead of her EP *Red Dragon*. "I'm in this position, and it's not by mistake," she says.

FUTURE Following a six-date U.S. tour last fall, Zwane has been preparing for a splashier stateside appearance: Coachella, where she will become the first amapiano act to perform at the festival. She will follow it up with performances at Afro Nation in Miami in May and Roots Picnic in Philadelphia in June. "It feels so surreal as someone who just started this whole journey," she says of her next few months. And yet, she hints at bigger goals — she hopes to curate, book and sell out more shows featuring women and amapiano acts this year. "The sound deserves to be on stages this big."

—HERAN MAMO

ON THE ROAD

TOURING 2023

HEART BEATS

THE STAGE IS A CANVAS FOR **ROSALÍA**'S AND **RAUW ALEJANDRO**'S BOUNDLESS CREATIVITY. OFF IT, THE ENGAGED DUO TAKES ITS RELATIONSHIP JUST AS SERIOUSLY

BY LEILA COBO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KANYA IWANA

Rosalía and Rauw photographed Feb. 11 at Ace Studios in Miami.
Styling by Chloe & Chenelle
On Rosalía: Ferragamo dress and shoes, AGMES earrings. On Rauw: Saint Laurent shirt, Ann Demeulemeester pants, Rick Owens shoes, Letra Studio necklace and rings, Octi rings, Alan Crocetti earring and ring.

AS THE LIGHTS DIMMED FOR RAUW ALEJANDRO'S sold-out show at Miami's FTX Arena in April 2022, Rosalía — wearing head-to-toe black, eyes hidden behind enormous shades — was quietly ushered to a second-row seat. For once, the spotlight was not on the stylish Spanish artist, but on her boyfriend: a compact, wiry dynamo who, for the next two hours, steamrolled relentlessly from hardcore reggaetón to '90s-inspired dance bops, supported by a troupe of dancers performing dazzling choreography.

"What Raúl does — sing and dance in a show from beginning to end — no other Latin artist does that," Rosalía whispered, her voice low but bursting with pride.

A year later, the moment still encapsulates the dynamic of perhaps the most fascinating couple in music right now. Rosalía and Puerto Rican reggaetón star Rauw, both 30, have been together for nearly four years. But even as their relationship and individual careers have flourished — he was No. 3 on *Billboard*'s 2022 year-end Top Latin Artist chart (behind only Bad Bunny among men), she No. 14 — they've rarely appeared in public or given interviews together, and have yet to perform or even collaborate together. Until now.

On March 24, the duo released *RR*, a three-track EP that is as public and passionate a declaration of love as it gets. On the trio of songs — "Beso," "Promesa" and "Vampiro" — both artists manage to sound like themselves, while creating an entirely different, beautifully intertwined sonic mix of techno pop with urban beats that moves from dreamy romantic to '90s dancefloor. At the end of the recently released "Beso" video, Rosalía tearfully displays a diamond ring — confirming the two are now engaged.

Out jointly on Columbia/Sony Music U.S. Latin (Rosalía is signed to Columbia; Rauw to Duars Entertainment, which releases his music through a joint venture with Sony Music U.S. Latin), *RR* arrives as two of the top recording and touring acts in the world have launched separate outings. Rosalía's 20-date festival tour, which kicked off at Lollapalooza Argentina on March 17 and includes prominent billings at Coachella and Primavera Sound, follows her *Motomami* world tour, which grossed $33.7 million and sold 443,000 tickets worldwide, landing her at No. 65 on *Billboard*'s year-end Top Ticket Sales chart and No. 7 on the year-end Top Latin Tours list, according to Billboard Boxscore.

"Rosalía is truly a global artist, and we focus on markets all over the world. Anywhere where her music is played, anywhere where there is a fan, is important to us," says her mother, Pilar Tobella, who has always been part of her management team.

Rauw's ambitious 80-plus-date global arena tour, which kicked off March 4 in Tampa, Fla., and already included back-to-back sold-out dates at the Miami-Dade Arena, comes on the heels of his *Vice Versa* tour, where he played 100 smaller shows globally between July 2021 and July 2022, grossing $24.5 million and selling 327,000 tickets across 54 of those shows.

Both artists' growth in capacity underscores their individual appeal and the growing global appetite for Latin music (see page 40). But the concurrence of their individual treks and *RR*'s release is a happy accident — the culmination of intense personal and artistic commitment finally ready to be unveiled.

"We wanted to make our relationship solid and build its foundations, and then, if music was meant to come, it would come," says Rosalía.

"Plus, we were in different stages in our careers, and we wanted to make our fans focus on what we were doing, which was our individual projects," adds Rauw. "People love drama in the entertainment world, and a romantic relationship will always take precedence. We felt if ours came to light, the effort we've both done toward our projects and our music would come second."

Seated side by side in matching black Gucci suits and starched white shirts, Rauw and Rosalía look, and act, symbiotic. In conversation, their speech patterns mimic their musical collaboration: They finish each other's sentences, pick up where the other leaves off and fill the tiny pockets of breath that remain open.

"I love the absolute independence they have with their creations, their careers and their ideas," says Sony Music Latin Iberia chairman/CEO Afo Verde, who has been close with both artists throughout their careers and who invited them to record portions of *RR* at the label's 5020 recording studio in Miami. "But you clearly hear both of them in what they've done together."

Rosalía has gained a cult-like following — not just for her genre-defying blending of flamenco with hip-hop, reggaetón, electronica and Latin dance rhythms, delivered with her ethereal yet powerful vocals, but also for conceptual concerts that straddle performance art and more traditional music and dance shows.

In Rauw, she has found an artistic kindred spirit, albeit one who occupies a slightly different lane. He is reggaetón to his core, but like her, he pushes his genre's boundaries — in his case, by incorporating '90s pop, house and club influences.

And so, when Rauw (real name: Raúl Alejandro Ocasio Ruiz) and Rosalía finally met at a Las Vegas hotel lounge during the 2019 Latin Grammys after months of Instagram DMs, their mutual reflection of each other's innermost artistic essence unsurprisingly sparked a romantic flame.

She wore a black Alexander Wang jumpsuit, he a blue and yellow bomber jacket; she drank water, he had whiskey. It was love at first sight, says Rauw: "100%." Behind-the-scenes collaboration quickly ensued, with Rosalía co-writing two tracks for his 2020 album, *Afrodisiaco*. Still, their careers remained on separate ascending paths. On the road, Rosalía scored key marquee festival bookings like Lollapalooza and Coachella, while Rauw worked his way from clubs to theaters to his current in-the-round arena setup.

Rauw, who is more prolific in the recording studio than Rosalía, has placed five top 10s on *Billboard*'s Top Latin Albums chart, including 2021's No. 1 *Vice Versa*. Rosalía, signed to Columbia Records, has two top 10s on the chart, but two Grammy Awards and 11 Latin Grammys (compared with his two), including two for album of the year.

Finally, last year, they began recording together. "One day, out of the blue, Rosalía sent me the three tracks, and I loved them," says Rauw's manager, Eric Duars, who also books and promotes his tours. "People may think it's a couple's project, but I see it as two artists coming together to do something very special. I'm always involved in the production of Rauw's music, but here, they knew exactly what they wanted."

"I think this will raise the bar for both of them across the globe," says Jen Mallory, president of Columbia Records. "It's not as if it was two labels saying, 'You should collaborate.' It's something they did together in a very special, safe, creative space. I think there's a beautiful symbiotic opportunity."

As Rosalía prepares for her European tour and Rauw crisscrosses the United States, onstage appearances together seem inevitable and should be an additive for both artists: Rosalía has a bigger following in Europe and among English speakers, while Rauw is firmly entrenched in the Latin American and U.S. Latin markets. But both say their respective fan bases have gradually warmed to each other.

"Many people who only listened to you before now listen to me, and the other way around, too," says Rosalía. Much like their music together, "It wasn't planned, but it's a blessing."

Okane coat, Phoebe Pendergast sunglasses, Marco Panconesi jewelry.

“OF COURSE MY CAREER IS SUPER IMPORTANT IN MY LIFE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IN MY LIFE, YOU’RE MY COMPANION, AND EVERYTHING ELSE COMES SECOND.”

—ROSALÍA

Ludovic de Saint Sernin coat, Cruda shoes.

You've jointly released music and have often prepared for your tours together. What have you learned from each other?

RAUW ALEJANDRO Rosi has a more solid music base than I do in the sense that I'm more extroverted in my music, but she's far more disciplined. When you work with someone so disciplined, it's impossible not to take something from that. And I'm disciplined, mind you; otherwise, I wouldn't be here.

ROSALÍA You are, baby.

RAUW But she's a freak-crazy workaholic. Piano lessons, dance lessons, voice lessons; what else can you learn when no one sings like you? At the beginning, I didn't really get it, but after some time, I said, "OK, let me try to follow her lead and see." And the difference is huge. If doing something is positive for her career, why can't I also absorb that if it adds to my career?

ROSALÍA You are far more relaxed. You're someone who really lets go. It's as if you have a lot of faith and just an organic feel. You're always telling me to relax, to let go more. And just telling me that teaches and helps me. You balance me.

RAUW I tell her my secrets, and she tells me hers. The same energy I put into my things, I put into hers.

ROSALÍA Same.

RAUW And we watch each other's backs. At a visual, stage level, we share ideas; also styling, outfits. We're two individual, independent artists, but we're a couple. And we kind of represent each other mutually. If I'm going to go out there and do something crazy, I sometimes think, "Heck, no: I'm Rosalía's boyfriend." I need to raise the bar, understand? We're taking care of our prestige and our work and ensuring it always looks the part. We motivate each other to keep rising to an infinite level.

ROSALÍA For example, he'll be out there during my sound check, and when I'm done, he'll say, "I noticed this or that." It's as if he were my ears. (*To Rauw*) When you're taping a video, I'm there, and I'm not there as your girlfriend. I'm literally there as the stylist or the stylist's assistant, or whatever they need me for. I'm there because I love you and I want to help. How can I help? And if I can help being your stylist's assistant, well, that's what I'll do.

In making music, what does each of you bring to the table that the other one lacks?

ROSALÍA I'm more of an overthinker in terms of the music process, and it's helped me a lot [when doing] music with him because he's super intuitive. His approach and his energy were especially positive to close the songs.

RAUW Naturally, I help close the songs. Otherwise, we'd never finish. This girl is always looking for …

ROSALÍA The twist.

RAUW The twist. Rosi is very exacting. She can play anything on the piano, and I play more by ear. She has like seven doctorates in music; my doctorates are with my ears.

ROSALÍA Your father, your grandfather [are both musicians]. I didn't come from that, so I had to study. You studied, but in a different way. There are many paths to becoming a musician.

RAUW But yeah, we complement each other in the studio. In music, we have a few different opinions, but we let each other flow.

You've collaborated with others. How is this different?

RAUW In terms of collaborations, the big difference is you're collaborating with the love of your life. At least, I am.

ROSALÍA Me, too.

RAUW That alone makes it more special, and it's easy to open your heart because you're with that person and the level of commitment to production and lyricism rises.

Was it scary to open up like that?

RAUW Not for me.

ROSALÍA But I understand what you mean. There was a point, for example, when I was writing "Promesa" where I wanted to make a list of all the things I wanted to do with you. And at the end, it's like a declaration of saying, "I want to be with you my entire life." Writing that in a way that I can look back at in 40 years and say, "I was honest" — well, that's a challenge.

Dancing is such a big element in both your shows. What does dance mean to each of you?

ROSALÍA It's another discipline, another extension of my artistic expression. It's something that helps me feel free onstage. I still don't dance as well as Raúl, but I'm

On Rosalía: Gucci suit, shirt, tie, gloves and shoes. On Rauw: Gucci suit, shirt, tie, gloves and shoes, Maria Black jewelry.

“WE WATCH EACH OTHER’S BACKS. AT A VISUAL, STAGE LEVEL, WE SHARE IDEAS ... WE’RE TWO INDIVIDUAL, INDEPENDENT ARTISTS, BUT WE’RE A COUPLE. AND WE KIND OF REPRESENT EACH OTHER MUTUALLY.”

—RAUW ALEJANDRO

ROSALÍA: HAIR BY NATALIA BRATIN. MAKEUP BY JULIANA GONZALEZ AT CREATIVE MANAGEMENT. RAUW: GROOMING BY MILLIE MORALES.

working on it because Raúl is a whole other level in terms of dance. I always think, “I have to try harder, I have to try harder!”

RAUW (*Laughs*.) You dance well! It’s different styles. I also love watching Rosi. She’s so strong, so confident in her show. Her act is very, very heavy duty. She’s one of those people who practices seven thousand times. Rosi’s flamenco segments are very strong. People go nuts.

ROSALÍA I practice twice as much as you, and you dance twice as well as I do. Even outside the scope of Spanish-language music, I don’t think anyone does it like you.

Can each of you describe your touring trajectory? How did you begin?

RAUW I began in clubs, then festivals, then theaters, then small venues and then arenas and now stadiums. And it was all in the Latin circuit, until my [2021] album *Vice Versa*, which allowed me to tour big venues in the U.S. for the first time. A big departure for me was playing [four sold-out dates] at el Choliseo [Coliseo de Puerto Rico in San Juan] in 2021. It was my first arena, and everything changed after that. Expectations grew, and the perception was immediately different.

Has your audience changed?

RAUW They’re mostly Latins. But here in the U.S., they’re Latins who speak English. They listen to music in Spanish, but they converse in English. I hear it when my videographers film the crowds here in the U.S. That says so much about the popularity of Spanish-language music.

And you, Rosalía?

ROSALÍA Bars. Bars. I started in bars. Then theaters, then arenas and festivals. Arenas only in my country, and at the same time, I was playing festivals around the world.

RAUW You’re always most popular in your own country. And then the goal is to conquer other places little by little. Used to be I could fill an arena in Puerto Rico but not in Texas. Then I could do New York, but not Ohio. Then, all of a sudden, all you play are arenas.

How did you conceive your current tours?

RAUW My tour changes every year as I learn more as an artist, just as my recordings change. When I went into the studio to record *Saturno* [released in November 2022], I was thinking about the tour, and I began to plan musically around that. That’s something I didn’t do before. This project is very focused on dance and on musical energy because everything is very upbeat. Obviously, there are a few ballads inside the album, and I’ll sing some of my old hits, but the tour’s backbone is [that feeling of] “Let’s go crazy!” More uptempo, very ’90s. There’s a visual element, but this is a 360 show, so the focus is on the center and on the lighting.

ROSALÍA I try to make every tour different. I start with the music; that’s the axis of everything. But at the same time, everything is connected. Everything feeds on itself. There are choreographies that lead me to make different music or music that I develop thinking about a choreography. Music is the spark, but the show gets created from many different points.

What can you tell us about your upcoming shows?

ROSALÍA In some ways, it will be similar to *Motomami* because a lot of the music is electronic, so having musicians onstage is not necessary nor does it make sense. Plus, I very much like the stage as a canvas for movement. That’s where I’m motivated now.

It’s interesting: Both of you are musicians’ musicians, but you’ve opted for more of a spectacle route.

ROSALÍA It depends on the projects. If this were like my first album, which was voice and guitar, this staging wouldn’t make sense. There is no better or worse. Sometimes people have prejudices [about] if having musicians is better or not. *Joder*, I’m singing for an hour and 50 minutes; I’m playing the piano, I’m playing guitar. I think there’s enough music.

RAUW I, on the other hand, come from a sports background. I’m a soccer player, and that really defined me. Athletes can play at their peak usually up to when they’re 33, 35, because it requires a lot of physicality. I can do these very physical and taxing tours now when I’m young. I don’t think I can play this type of tour when I’m older. I still have time to play concerts with a full band, a little more chill, a little more musical and project another vibe.

Latin Explodes — Live

RAUW ALEJANDRO sold out two in-the-round shows at Miami-Dade Arena March 11-12, moving over 30,000 tickets and more than doubling his 2022 ticket sales at the same venue, according to Billboard Boxscore. The feat highlights North America's growing Latin touring market as an increasing number of acts across genres tour more cities, play bigger venues and sell more tickets.

The top 25 Latin tours of 2019 grossed $251.3 million and sold 2.8 million tickets, while the top 25 Latin tours of 2022 grossed $990.8 million and sold 8 million tickets (based on Boxscore's reporting period of Nov. 1, 2021-Oct. 31, 2022). Bad Bunny, who grossed $373.5 million during that time, obviously did some heavy lifting, but he's far from the only force driving the boom. Six Latin tours in 2022 out-grossed the top Latin tour of 2019. And even if those six tours were removed from the top 25 tally, 2022's numbers would still beat 2019's.

"There's no limitation when you look at Latin," says Hans Schafer, senior vp of Latin touring for Live Nation. "You see high-demand artists who can command high-demand tickets. You see other artists who are coming in and are offering accessible ticket prices, and people are paying them. Latin is also seeing more non-Latin fans come to their shows versus other genres."

Likewise, concert promoters who were once only marginally interested in Latin touring, if at all, are now embracing it. Case in point: Nashville-based Outback Presents, which is entering the Latin market for the first time by partnering with Rauw's manager, Eric Duars, and his live-entertainment arm, Duars Live, to promote Rauw's U.S. tour.

The embrace of Latin extends to the highest echelons of the American concert industry: Coachella, long a bellwether for broader live-sector trends, booked its first Latin headliner this year in Bad Bunny, and its lineup features several prominent and rising Latin acts, from newcomer DannyLux to veterans Los Fabulosos Cadillacs.

"Latin is more mainstream now," says CAA agent Bruno del Granado, whose client list includes Luis Fonsi and Gloria Estefan. "Everybody wants to be in Latin, not just the small mom-and-pop promoters."

Regional Mexican music, for example, was for many years the realm of indie regional promoters. But it's now being eyed by the likes of Live Nation, which last year presented massive tours by Los Bukis and is currently producing outings by Pepe Aguilar and Alejandro Fernández. "That music is crossing over into other communities in a way we've never seen before," says Schafer.

Independent promoters see it, too. Pedro Zamora, founder of Michigan-based Zamora Entertainment, typically presents 500-600 shows each year, including club dates and casinos. This year, it will likely be between 700 and 800 shows, including arena tours by Los Tigres Del Norte and Los Temerarios, acts who a decade ago were playing festivals and rodeos. "The population has grown, and those fans are older. They're more affluent, and they want to go to theaters or arenas," says Zamora.

Younger fans are also flocking to arenas to see new acts like Rauw. In 2021, the Puerto Rican star was playing clubs in secondary markets like the Carolinas and Connecticut, a strategic decision that was made so he could develop stage chops and open markets. By the end of 2021, he was doing arenas. Now he's in the midst of an 80-plus-date tour (including a 34-city U.S. leg) where the smallest venue is an 8,000-seat theater in Brazil.

"This is summer camp for everyone," says Duars of the learning curve. "We want this to be amazing." —L.C.

As you embark on new tours, what's one word that describes each of you onstage?

ROSALÍA Freedom.

RAUW Beast mode.

Most people may not realize just how physical both your tours are. Rauw, when I walked in today, you were massaging your shoulders with your Theragun, and you're still in rehearsal mode. How do you prepare? Do you train together?

RAUW We have different routines because our bodies are different and our objectives are different, but cardio is always in there. Actually, at this stage [with the tour about to start], I do less cardio because there's a lot of dancing onstage. We rehearse from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. every single day, with a lunch break. And I travel with a physio[therapist] and a chiropractor.

ROSALÍA We also train together at the gym. We combine HIIT and cardio workouts. I train five, six days a week from approximately 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and then I stay till about 10 p.m., making music. I rehearse between five and six months for a tour, but if it were up to me, I'd prep a whole year.

Rosalía, how different is it to play European countries versus Latin America?

ROSALÍA I don't change the show. When all is said and done, a stage is a stage. The way I approach that stage, how sacred that stage is for me, never changes, no matter where I am, big or small. [Audience-wise], there are cultures who demonstrate their appreciation in different ways; some are louder, some are more internal, but that doesn't mean it's worse or better. It's simply different, and I try to always be generous onstage.

So even though your tour is very rehearsed, you take liberties?

ROSALÍA There's improvisation, 100%. That's the magic.

RAUW Always.

In the past three years, do you see a difference in the reaction and perception of Latin tours and music in Spanish?

ROSALÍA People are very receptive to music in Spanish. You see its presence around the world, even in festival headliners.

RAUW The movement has grown so much that today we can tour places we wouldn't have been able to before. Reggaetón is my base, and countries like Germany and Holland were not available to us before.

Your tours look expensive.

ROSALÍA To me, the audience's experience is more important than the numbers. It's something I apply to the way I make music and to how I build the tour and a show. Making the show as exciting as possible is more important than being profitable. Plus, people may think artists make lots of money on tours, but many times, you have to invest. Something that looks profitable may not be.

Touring is hard. How do you cope with the challenges of tour life?

ROSALÍA Notwithstanding the joy and goodwill, and the love you get from fans, it's very draining. It's like constantly building and destroying your home. You arrive at a hotel, you organize everything with all the care in the world, and the next day, you have to dismantle everything and leave. Being a nomad isn't easy psychologically or emotionally. But it helps me a lot that you and I speak so much over FaceTime.

RAUW I try to think about the future and be as positive as possible within the sacrifices we make. We're human. There are days when you really don't want to do it; you feel that pressure. But thinking about the future helps me: There's one life to live, it goes by fast, and this is only one little sliver of my life where I'll be able to enjoy this. Afterward, the cycle of life will take us to another stage, and someone will be in this place, touring and living the moment. I'm just trying to enjoy it to the fullest because it'll go by fast.

You're both in such a good moment in your careers. What will happen when one of you is up and the other is down?

RAUW When I met Rosi, she was positioned much better than me, and that was never a problem.

ROSALÍA I'm lucky to be your partner, and I want to be there for you, *sabes*? And I feel you're there for me, independent of the careers. For me, our relationship is first, and then there's everything else. Of course my career is super important in my life, but at the same time, in my life, you're my companion, and everything else comes second.

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PHOTO BY: BELLE ANDRADE

THE UNCOMMON

BLUE OTTER
POLARIZED

Combs photographed March 14 at the Nashville Municipal Auditorium.

Styling by Katy Robbins
Asos shirt, Harbor Bay T-shirt, Joe's Jeans jeans, Bass Pro Shops hat.

EVERYMAN

PRE-PANDEMIC TICKET PRICING.

NO PYRO.

MASSIVE SOLD-OUT CROWDS —
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC.

HOW LUKE COMBS BECAME COUNTRY MUSIC'S GLOBAL TOURING "UNICORN"

BY NATALIE WEINER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC RYAN ANDERSON

AS LUKE COMBS’ booking agent, WME partner Aaron Tannenbaum, began plotting the European leg of the country star’s massive 2023 world tour, he encountered some promoters, in places like Hamburg, Germany, and Zurich, who were skeptical that a country act would sell tickets in Europe. So he repeated a kind of mantra to them: “You can always count on Luke Combs.”

He was right: Combs sold out all nine European dates he booked (and in substantially larger venues than initially planned). But the mantra — a testament not only to Combs’ dependability as a global touring act but to his rock-solid character — has plenty of less glamorous applications, too. Today, Combs, 33, is sitting in his manager’s Nashville office (a memento-filled monument to, well, him) at the beginning of our interview when a staffer pops her head in. “Nicole [Combs’ wife] needs your keys,” she says. The base of his 9-month-old son Tex’s car seat is in Combs’ truck, and Nicole needs to take the little guy to daycare.

“Do you know how to get it out?” Combs asks hesitantly. He starts to explain, then jumps up. “I’ll just do it, it takes literally one second.” He turns to me. “Baby stuff!”

You can always count on Luke Combs, and that is basically his brand. Without a shtick beyond “everyman,” Combs now fills stadiums nationwide as the Country Music Association’s reigning entertainer of the year, hot off his 15th No. 1 single on *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart. Just your neighborhood consistent, reliable global sensation, on the cusp of bringing country to one of the widest non-pop crossover audiences it has ever had, signature red Solo cups in hand and fishing shirt on as he constructs a kind of fame that’s built to last.

“He’s just Luke, our friend, you know?” says his longtime tour manager, Ethan Strunk, who has been with Combs since he pitched himself to the singer when Combs walked into the Opry Mills Boot Barn in Nashville, where Strunk was working in 2016. “How little Luke has changed is baffling to me. There’s no way I could do it. He’s the same funny, funny guy. People say that all the time, but it’s just the truth.”

With his fourth studio album, *Gettin’ Old* (which arrived March 24 on River House Artists/Columbia Nashville), and an ongoing 16-country international tour, which kicked off at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on March 25, Combs not only wants to cement his place at the top of the country heap but prove that he can transcend it — without changing anything about himself or his music. As Combs puts it, “The music has the ability to reach a lot more people than the marketing behind it does. We have a little bit of something for everybody, and that’s the way I want it to be.”

The North Carolina native has colored outside of country’s lines from the start. He built buzz on social media and through local live shows before signing with Lynn Oliver-Cline of River House Artists, and though he did eventually do some conventional radio circuits and a little time in the opening-slot trenches, it only took him two years to go from playing 250-capacity clubs to headlining his first arena tour.

His team, which has remained more or less the same since he started touring heavily in 2015, attributes his massive and rapid success in part to the unorthodox approach it has taken from the beginning. “The strategy was, ‘Let’s play the rooms that a rock act would play,’ ” says his manager, Chris Kappy, of the early days. “We didn’t play all the honky-tonks like everybody else did.”

“We had the mentality that we needed to push the limits of what you would think a country artist can and would do,” adds Tannenbaum. He booked Combs outside the genre at festivals like Lollapalooza (2018), Bonnaroo (2017) and Austin City Limits (2017) — and out of the country (in the United Kingdom and Australia), building a foundation for the international draw he has now. “Everything we’re doing as far as expanding globally, it’s not really off-script,” Tannenbaum says. “It’s just a different iteration of the same thing we’ve been doing since the beginning.”

That thing is an ever-growing iteration of Combs, the singer-songwriter, which, to the outsider, hasn’t changed all that much from his 250-person club dates. “Even when we started out in arenas, we didn’t want any fire or any crazy stunts,” says Combs. “You just come out and do the show, right? I think sometimes that can be so powerful in and of itself.” (He adds with jovial self-deprecation: “I’m not running around like Kenny Chesney.”)

Combs started sprinkling in stadium dates when he resumed touring following the pandemic pause in 2021, starting with Kidd Brewer Stadium at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., his would-be alma mater had music not come calling. Some initial trial and error was necessary because no one on his team had ever been part of a stadium tour.

“We always wanted the show to be about the music and to feel intimate somehow — which is a mega challenge in a stadium,” says Combs. “How do you entertain that many people? How do you make it an experience worth coming back to? There are people traveling a long way to come to this.”

Yet so far he has resisted the temptation to entice return customers by adding more eye-popping elements to his set. The show is Combs and seven band members, with strategically positioned video monitors to make everyone in the stadium feel as close to Combs as possible — and that’s basically it.

“I’m not flying in on a motorcycle,” he quips. “Live band, no tracks. Everything going out of the speakers, we’re fucking playing it when you hear it.”

That’s not to say Combs doesn’t see the value in elaborate stadium production — it’s just not for him. “Taylor Swift is like going to see Ringling Bros., and my show is like going to a demolition derby,” he jokes. “You’re coming to drink beer and be like, ‘Hell yeah.’ ”

There has been something of a learning curve as Luke Combs Inc. has adjusted to a stadium-size setup. For example, the thrust stage used at Combs’ first stadium shows — Kidd Brewer in 2021 and Atlanta, Denver and Seattle in 2022 — was 8 feet tall, making it nearly impossible for Combs to see, much less connect with fans in the pit.

“Especially coming off doing the 360 arena thing, where you’re right in the middle and everybody feels pretty close, you go out in the stadiums and man, once the spots hit you out there, you almost can’t see anything,” says Combs. “You can see two rows of people, and then there’s just like infinite blackness.”

This time, the thrust will be both larger and at a lower level than the main stage. “You’re more in the crowd,” Combs adds. “I really wanted to feel that. I love playing small clubs, and feeling like people are right there is really nice.”

> **“PEOPLE IN OUR GENRE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SO CONTENT WITH JUST DOING THE LOWER 48 … BUT I FEEL LIKE COUNTRY MUSIC HAS SUCH A PLACE IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF JUST THE STATES.”**
>
> —COMBS

FANS FIRST” IS THE SLOGAN of Kappy’s Make Wake management company, and one that permeates its decisions. Combs’ fans, called the Bootleggers, are so named for one of his early “hits” (his scare quotes), “Let the Moonshine,” and its ties to his Appalachian upbringing. He and Kappy started a private Facebook group for Bootleggers in 2015, the same year Kappy began managing a then-unsigned Combs; today, it has over 175,000 members, despite being entirely separate from the official Bootleggers club that fans can now sign up for on Combs’ own site to access perks and presales. One of those perks is the VIB (Very Important Bootlegger) meet-and-greet giveaway — which is the only VIP offering on Combs’ tours and completely free.

“I’ve always just felt really weird about, like, charging people to meet me,” he says. “Maybe that’s just me feeling like, ‘Well, it’s not worth it.’ ” By making meet-and-greets almost completely random (25 fans are chosen per show through a lottery on Combs’ site), Combs gets to see “a real representation of who’s there,” as he puts it. “I just want to meet people who came to the show, whether it’s their first show or their 50th show. It’s like people who would have never gotten the chance to meet me or could never have afforded it. Because I couldn’t have afforded that growing up.”

GROOMING BY CALI JEFFRIES

HB shirt, Harbor Bay T-shirt, Joe's Jeans jeans, M.L. Leddy boots, Miller Lite vintage hat.

Asos shirt, Harbor Bay T-shirt, Joe's Jeans jeans, Bass Pro Shops hat.

“WE’RE NOT LOOKING TO TAKE A SONG TO [ADULT TOP 40] OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT WHEN WE’RE STILL REACHING NEW EARS. THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH WORK EVERYWHERE.”

—CHRIS KAPPY, MANAGER

His manager is willing to put it more bluntly. “That’s not the type of people we want,” Kappy recalls telling a banker when turning down a $5,000 offer to meet Combs at the AT&T Stadium show. “I’d rather have the guy who can barely afford to come to the show because that’s more of a real fan than you wanting a picture with Luke for your Instagram.”

“I always want my fans to understand that I’ve never made any decisions based off how much money I can get out of them,” Combs says. “It already costs so much to do anything, right? I want them to love the music and feel like they saw a great show that someone put a lot of fucking thought into and did it at a price that was affordable to them.”

That’s why he has kept ticket prices at pre-pandemic levels (an average of $88) and has a section of $25 tickets at every show; why he has free preparties and tailgates attached to most of his stadium dates; why he refunded fans after a set in Maine last year because he felt like his voice wasn’t up to snuff (despite the fact that he did perform a shortened set); why he doesn’t only tour in the places where it’s most straightforward and lucrative. Combs is playing the long game.

“We’re trying to build a career so people can meet at a Luke Combs show and then eventually bring their kids to it and be like, ‘This is how it all happened,’ ” Kappy explains.

“Could I have gone out and done super-mega platinum tickets at even more stadiums and made an assload of money? Probably so,” Combs adds. “But I think eventually the fans will be like, ‘I’m not doing that again.’ ”

And it’s still more efficient for him: nearly 1 million tickets sold for 2023, for the fewest dates (39) he has worked in years. For 16 weeks, he’ll bus into North American cities on Thursday night, rehearse Friday, play Saturday and return to his home outside Nashville on Sunday. Then, after three weeks in Australia and three weeks in Europe and the United Kingdom (with a sizable break in between), he’s done for the year, without needing to bring Nicole and baby Tex along for the ride. “One show a week is like … dude!” he says. “People dream about doing one show a week.”

Combs’ international appeal is rooted in that same fans-first ethos. He went to play in Australia when it wasn’t profitable; now, the only reason he’s not booking multiple nights at stadiums there is because his trip coincides with the Women’s World Cup and all such venues are booked.

“There was a trust factor between he and I,” Kappy explains. “I said, ‘Look, I need you to do this, and you’re going to lose money. But instead of going and playing Raleigh every July at the amphitheater, you’re going to build markets.” Now Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, Australia, are among Combs’ top 10 streaming cities worldwide; some of the cities in Oceania where Combs is selling out arenas on this year’s tour, he has never even played before.

“People in our genre have always been so content with just doing [the] lower 48 because that has been good, that has been great. That has been safe. That’s where the money is,” says Combs. “But I feel like country music has such a place in the world outside of just the States.”

There is no template for what Combs has been able to accomplish internationally, and the biggest hurdle, according to his management team, has been getting promoters on board without any comparable artists to reference — mostly by insisting repeatedly that the demand is nearly insatiable. “We didn’t come here to punt,” Kappy says. “So the goal is like, ‘Let’s throw a Hail Mary.’ And a lot of our Hail Marys are getting caught.”

A favorite anecdote among Team Combs is about when the singer played Quebec City’s multigenre Festival d’Été last summer — a booking that apparently made some of the event’s organizers nervous.

“I had personally been aggressively pursuing that opportunity for Luke for five years, and I kept getting back, ‘No, country doesn’t really work up here. He’s not a headliner,’ ” says Tannenbaum. Combs drew upwards of 70,000 people.

“Everybody was singing every word to every song — even the deep cuts — but then he would stop and everyone was speaking French,” Kappy recalls.

“He’s a unicorn,” says Tannenbaum. “I don’t really know how else to say it.”

That Quebec City date helped raise their expectations for this international tour. “We believed we had something really big with this,” Tannenbaum explains. “However, there wasn’t much precedent for the promoters to calibrate their expectations on, and the comps the promoters did have didn’t perform very well.”

So Tannenbaum and his colleagues at WME agreed to book European venues they felt confident Combs could fill several times over, because those were the ones they could get promoters to sign on with, and were prepared with options to upgrade all of them to larger rooms if tickets sold well enough. Every single European date got upgraded. Combs’ Copenhagen show in October, for example, was initially booked in a 1,500-capacity club; due to demand, it was upgraded to a 12,000-seat arena. “We’re not stopping there — South America is our next big, big goal,” says Tannenbaum. “By and large, this is virgin territory for artists coming from the world Luke has established himself in. But we’ve overcome similar barriers and precedents elsewhere in the world, and we expect to achieve the same success in these markets.”

And incredibly, Combs has been able to reach pop star levels of global success with nary a whiff of pop crossover, aside from a *CMT Crossroads* special with Leon Bridges and a cover of Ed Sheeran’s “Dive.” (He does cover Tracy Chapman on his new record, a decision made partly out of his personal fear that some people today might not know “Fast Car.”)

“Luke Combs is a country artist, and Luke is very happy being just a country artist,” says Kappy. “If the opportunity presented itself to do something in that world, sure, but we’re not looking to take a song to [adult top 40] or something like that when we’re still reaching new ears. Three chords and the truth work everywhere.”

Though he might make it look easy, taking over the world as Luke Combs, regular guy, has its challenges. “I think what has been one of my biggest assets has also been one of the things that was the hardest for me,” Combs says. “I am just me. There’s not, like, an act. My driver license says ‘Luke Combs’ on it. I’m 300 pounds with a neck beard. I can’t go out and not wear a hat and people don’t know who I am.

“I struggled with that a lot because I almost felt trapped, like a zoo animal or something,” he continues. “Now I don’t even think about it anymore.”

So Combs signs the autographs and takes the pictures, accepting them as a sometimes invasive part of the job he signed up for, and reminding himself that he would much rather people hate his music and think he’s a “pretty sick dude” than the opposite. He would prefer to insulate his son (and, soon, Tex’s little brother: Combs and Nicole just announced they’re expecting) from the craziness that comes with superstardom but knows that it’s only a matter of time before he has to explain why people come up to them in the grocery store.

“I don’t want him to be like, ‘My dad’s so great because he’s a country singer,’ ” he says. “I want him to be like, ‘My dad’s so great because he gives a fuck about me and goes fishing with me and listens to my problems and helps me when I’m scared.’ ”

It’s hard to find a chink in Combs’ grounded armor, a reason not to buy in the way that hundreds of thousands of fans now have — trusting that whether or not they speak his language, or relate to his songs’ Southern touchstones, or also wear hunting gear and cowboy boots and Crocs (with whom he has collaborated on a comfy clog), they can count on him to make them feel something. They can do that without spending their savings because accessibility is a top priority for Combs and his team, right after the music. “Look at how much money we’re making,” he says. “Does it really even matter if we make double? What’s the difference between having $5 million and $500 million? How much happier are you? Is it that much? Or is it like 1% happier?”

Instead, he wants to chart a career, and a life, that’s extraordinary in its very ordinariness.

“I didn’t get into music to be famous or rich,” Combs concludes. “I got into music because I love singing. I love singing for big crowds of people, and I feel like I’m good at it. People like to hear me do it. And I want to continue to do that as long as possible.”

FOUR LEAF CLOVER

SOUND WAVES

FROM BROADWAY DIVAS TO METALHEADS TO EDM DJs, MUSIC CRUISES OFFER ALL KINDS OF ARTISTS A STAGE LIKE NO OTHER — AND SIXTHMAN HAS CORNERED THE MARKET

BY STEVE KNOPPER

USUALLY WHEN Lyle Lovett performs, the stage does not move. But the 2010 Cayamo music festival took place on a luxury liner in the Caribbean — and 14-foot waves shook him out of his usual stoicism. "I grew up being the carsick kid. Couldn't ride in the back seat," says the Texas singer-songwriter. "I was doing an interview with Steve Earle for his Sirius radio show [while on board], and I had to step out of the room and come back in."

Cayamo is one of 18 festivals this year run by Sixthman, an Atlanta-based company founded in 2001 when Sister Hazel's then-manager, Andy Levine, invited 400 of the rock band's superfans to take over 200 cabins of the Carnival Jubilee. It ended up kicking off an appealing new concert-business model: Music cruises gave artists the rare opportunity to play intimate shows for core groups of well-off devotees — all while enjoying access to high-end meals, luxury hotel rooms and slot machines (the occasional need for Dramamine notwithstanding).

Since then, Sixthman (which is now a subsidiary of Norwegian Cruise Line) has paid hundreds of acts to perform on various cruise-ship decks — at first, late-1990s stars like Edwin McCain and Tonic; then a relatively unknown Zac Brown; then bigger names ranging from Lynyrd Skynyrd to Kid Rock to KISS to Paramore. Today, Sixthman focuses on booking veteran acts with loyal, affluent fan bases — big enough to fill a 2,500- to 4,000-passenger cruise, but generally not an arena.

Lovett is one of dozens of artists, from Broadway divas to metalheads to EDM DJs, scheduled to headline Sixthman cruises over the next year. That's because, unlike traditional, tightly curated festivals like Bonnaroo or Coachella, the company is open to booking acts of any genre — as long as their fans can afford roughly $600 to $5,000 for a cabin over four to seven nights.

In 2023 and 2024, Sixthman's headliners include 311 (which just finished a cruise from Miami to Mexico and Honduras), guitar hero Joe Bonamassa (whose two Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea voyages per year include a trip from Greece to Croatia in August), Stevie Van Zandt (who curated this year's eighth installment of Outlaw Country Cruise, topped by Blackberry Smoke, Lucinda Williams and Steve Earle) and Lamb of God (which headlines the Headbanger's Boat on Halloween, along with GWAR, Mastodon, Hatebreed and others). "If it's a passionate community, that is an opportunity for us," says Jeff Cuellar, Sixthman's vp of events, community management, Clockwise from bottom left: Pro wrestler Jericho at his Rock 'N' Wrestling Rager at Sea: Four Leaf Clover cruise in February; a crowd-surfing fan of Jericho's; passengers aboard The Rock Boat in January; Joe King Carrasco on the Outlaw Country Cruise 7 in January; performers aboard Cayamo 2023 in February.

JOE KING CARRASCO
OUTLAW COUNTRY CRUISE 7
21 - 27, 2023
STIRRUP CAY - COZUMEL
OUTLAW COUNTRY CRUISE
AUGIE MEYERS JOE KING CARRASCO
JOE KING CARRASCO

marketing and branding. "We've done our research. We know their numbers."

Although the COVID-19 pandemic dealt music cruises a one-two punch in 2020, when both cruises and concerts were shut down, the sectors have returned to full strength. Almost every event sells out quickly, according to Cuellar; some, like the old-school hip-hop Rock the Bells festival, even before their lineups are announced.

"You've got a really dedicated fan at your fingertips that artists get to be in front of for three, four, five, seven days," says Lindsey Myers, a CAA music touring agent whose team has handled cruise bookings for artists including KISS and Kesha. "They wouldn't necessarily have the same sort of avid fan at your average festival."

Cruise attendance in general has boomed since the lockdowns: According to the latest Cruise Market Watch report, passenger numbers rebounded in 2021 with more than 13 million (though that's still nearly half of 2019's pre-pandemic attendance). The top company, Royal Caribbean, recently reported that yearly revenues jumped from $1.5 billion in 2021 to over $8.8 billion last year (due to high operating expenses, the cruise line did experience a net loss of $2.2 billion in 2022). Norwegian, according to its fourth-quarter 2022 results, disclosed a higher-than-expected loss (mostly due to $13.6 billion of debt), but overall revenue was up 225%, to $1.6 billion, and revenue generated from each passenger rose 23% compared with the same period in 2019.

Many cruise companies have music events — Royal Caribbean's annual '80s Cruise starred Devo, The Church and Living Colour in March, and Celebrity Summit's Disco Cruise recently had Kool & The Gang and KC & The Sunshine Band. But Sixthman excels at lineups that feel contemporary — not like Sailing With the Oldies. "Sixthman have really become masters at determining which artists will work and which ones won't," says Cory Brennan, founder/CEO of management company 5B, which represents perennial Norwegian headliners like Flogging Molly and 311. "There's a lot of homework and research that goes into this."

And for such headliners, a ship is one giant marketing and branding opportunity. Train, which has its own wine company, holds tastings on its Sail Around the Sun cruises; singer Hayley Williams has sold her Good Dye Young hair color on Paramore's Parahoy! cruises in recent years; and Melissa Etheridge raised money for her charitable foundation, which supports scientific research on opioid addiction. "That's invaluable advertising," Cuellar says. "Now everybody who's there is converted: 'I'm not only a fan of Hayley, I'm going out and spreading the word.' "

Artists who headline cruises participate in an economic "host model" as opposed to a standard flat-fee festival model, according to Cuellar. Part of their income is usually a guaranteed payment, similar to what they might receive at any land-based event. But they might also share some of the revenue from food and alcohol sales, which is not part of the deal for most concerts and festivals.

Most music cruises offer all-inclusive meal packages as part of the cost, but attendees pay extra for what Deb Klein, Etheridge's manager, calls "onboard revenue" — including casinos, excursions in destination cities, art auctions and alcohol. Etheridge, whose most recent Sixthman headlining date was last fall, takes a guarantee, then participates in a 50-50 "rev share" deal for the rest of her salary, Klein says. (Transporting band, crew and freight to the cruise docks and on and off ships costs artists out of pocket.) "It's really a joint venture," Klein says. "Believe me, it's a lot of work. For us, it's about the community and the connection. And the finances, too."

Overall music-cruise revenue, Bonamassa says, can be 30% to 50% higher than what a club promoter might pay for a Wednesday-night gig. So an artist making $10,000 for a dry-land festival date might make $15,000 for a cruise. (Nonheadliners' salaries are comparable to traditional festivals, artist representatives say.) "Why does it cost more?" Bonamassa asks. "You're doing multiple shows. You have the band and crew out there, you're paying salaries for a week. By the time you add it all up, it's an expensive undertaking."

But other artist reps say expenses are low compared with traditional arena, amphitheater and festival dates. "The narrative you are going to hear from agents and managers is a justification for charging outrageous guarantees, because 'you are locking up our band for a week and asking them to play multiple times,' " says Mark Willis, host partner for pro wrestler Chris Jericho's Rock 'N' Wrestling Rager at Sea, a Sixthman cruise that sails every January and stars Jericho's own metal band, Fozzy. "But that agent/manager will never admit how much money their budget saves in accommodations and meals and drinks and backline and crew and staging and production and runners and bus drivers and hotels."

As for the cost of admission, the ticket price is in line with a Bonnaroo or Coachella VIP experience, with Sixthman more like a travel agent than a box office, helping fans coordinate advance planning for food, lodging and transportation in addition to the concerts themselves. Attendees are what land-based concerts and festivals might call "super VIPs," Cuellar adds — they pay extra to experience artist meet-and-greets, unexpected musical collaborations and glimpses of, say, The Beach Boys participating in a *Family Feud* game somewhere on deck or singer Mike Love bowling (as they did on their own cruise). Lovett has spied his bandmates playing poker in the ship's casino. Headlining artists can "curate" their own festivals, too: Flogging Molly, for its cruise in November, will offer "the only floating skate ramp that I'm aware of," says Brennan, and during its cruise, 311 plays basketball with fans. "Every aspect of the cruise is a chance for you to be involved financially and creatively," he adds.

When cruises restarted in mid-2021, they required proof of vaccination and conducted COVID-19 testing on board — which worked for early music-cruise headliners such as Etheridge, who was doing the same for her own shows at the time. For Norwegian, COVID-19 remains a concern: In its December financial filings, the organization predicted the virus will still have "a significant impact on the company's financial results and liquidity."

But from a concert-business perspective, cruise-ship life is back to normal. "For a while, it seemed like, 'Were people going to want to do these things anymore?' " says Bob McLynn, whose management clients include Train. "Just like the live industry, as far as I'm concerned, it's fully back." ▪

JERICHO: TROY WALSH. CAYAMO, CARRASCO, ROCK BOAT: WILL BYINGTON.

THE NEW CLASSICS

AS ROCK'S TOURING LEGENDS ENTER THEIR GOLDEN YEARS, A NEW GENERATION OF BANDS — WITH QUALITY, GROWING CATALOGS AND LOYAL, LEGION FAN BASES — ARE ESTABLISHING CAREERS ON THE ROAD BUILT TO LAST

BY ERIC RENNER BROWN ILLUSTRATION BY MARK HARRIS

IN AUGUST 1989 — 26 years after releasing their first single, and seven years since their last tour — The Rolling Stones hit the road. Over the next calendar year, the *Steel Wheels*/Urban Jungle Tour took the rock legends around the world, playing over 100 shows and reaffirming their commercial clout.

Two similarly epic yearlong treks — 1994-95's *Voodoo Lounge* world tour and 1997-98's *Bridges to Babylon* tour — followed; the three outings grossed $661.7 million combined, according to Billboard Boxscore, or roughly $1.3 billion today, adjusted for inflation. In the process, the Stones defined what middle age could look like for rock artists and proved that established acts with deep catalogs and legions of fans still had touring potency.

As the Stones crisscrossed the globe in the '90s, new rock heroes like blink-182 and Weezer were making names for themselves. Now, three decades later, those acts are as deep into their careers as the Stones were into theirs in the '90s. And as older touring stalwarts like Paul McCartney, Elton John and the Stones stare down their golden years, alt-rock's now middle-aged lodestars have started to assume the mantle of reliable, top-grossing arena and stadium artists (and at roughly the same time that their most loyal fans, who've aged along with them, have deeper pockets to afford such tickets). But the blueprint they're using isn't identical to their precursors.

The 2021-22 Hella Mega Tour took Green Day, Fall Out Boy and Weezer to stadiums in the United States and Europe — proving along the way to fans and industry insiders alike that alt-rockers of the '90s and early aughts could now fill the kinds of venues that were once only the provenance of pop stars and classic rock acts.

"Hella Mega obviously laid some framework for, 'Hey, these rock tours are still really, really big; these songs are still so relevant,' " says Live Nation global tour promoter Steve Ackles, who worked on the team behind the stadium run. "Green Day, blink-182, a lot of those bands in that genre, the songs really never went away. I think there's an authenticity in their songwriting that has just created timeless music."

With a gross of $92.2 million, according to Billboard Boxscore, the bill also proved the commercial viability of package tours, the format that forgoes lesser-known openers in favor of support artists who themselves can drive substantial ticket sales. "It was one plus one plus one equals five," says Crush Music co-founder Bob McLynn, whose company manages Hella Mega's three marquee bands. "I definitely know it influenced a lot of the different tours out there. A package is nothing new, but I think a package of that nature was definitely groundbreaking."

On Hella Mega, Weezer played before Fall Out Boy and Green Day, but this year, the band will headline amphitheaters on its Indie Rock Roadtrip, a package offering with rotating support from Modest Mouse, Spoon, Future Islands, Momma, Joyce Manor and White Reaper. "I think their touring is stronger than ever," McLynn says of Weezer, which toured the United States every year from 2008 to 2019. "I think the fan base is stronger than ever, and I think continuing to put out great new music is a part of that."

Since 2019, Weezer has released four albums and four EPs, which have spawned four No. 1 hits on *Billboard*'s Alternative Airplay chart. McLynn recognizes that "there's legacies tied to all these acts" but emphasizes the importance of "not just playing defense with the brand, [but] playing offense with it."

"There's definitely acts out there that just kind of rest on their brand and their catalog, and they go out and they do successful tours," he continues. "But most of the acts we work with really are about innovating, and they're still hungry to make new and better music." In doing so, a band like Weezer can remain front of mind for existing fans while, critically, reaching new ones — who, thanks to the accessibility that streaming offers, can become superfans in short order.

Pop-punk legends blink-182 co-headlined the Bleezer Tour with Weezer in 2009, and this year will set out on a hotly anticipated trek of its own. While blink-182 toured in the latter half of the 2010s, it hasn't hit the road with founding member Tom DeLonge since 2014, making its 2023 arena outing — which coincides with an upcoming new album by the original trio and a 13-week Alternative Airplay No. 1 in October's "Edging" — a must-see for fans.

"This was by far the fastest-selling tour of their career," says CAA co-head of North American touring and music agent Darryl Eaton, who has booked the band since 1999. "We've done the numbers in the past, but we've never done the numbers at this velocity." For Eaton, while blink-182 has a strong foundation of classic hits and longtime fans, it's far from a nostalgia act, narrowly defined. "I've always marveled at how they absolutely regenerate a young fan base," he says.

Blink-182 hasn't embarked on its tour yet — drummer Travis Barker sustained a gnarly finger injury in rehearsal, forcing a postponement of the run's first leg, in South America, until 2024 — but Eaton makes informed predic-

From left: blink-182's Barker, Death Cab for Cutie's Gibbard and Weezer frontman Rivers Cuomo.

tions about its audience today based on the success of 2022's pop-punk-focused Las Vegas fest When We Were Young, which blink-182 will headline along with Green Day this fall. At When We Were Young, "it was a lot of young kids," he says. "Yeah, a lot of people in their 30s and 40s [were] going and reliving it, but it was also a huge amount of energy and interest in a much younger audience."

Death Cab for Cutie debuted slightly later than Weezer or blink-182 — its first album, *Something About Airplanes*, dropped in 1998 — but has followed a similar path to becoming a road fixture: consistent touring, reverence for its catalog, commercially successful new material and a big-tent approach that welcomes returning fans along with new ones. This fall, Death Cab will embark on one of its biggest tours to date, and one that was informed partly by industry trends — albeit with a twist.

"COVID-19 happened, but even before then, we started seeing the proliferation of these package tours," says Brilliant Corners founding partner Jordan Kurland, who has managed Death Cab since 2003, citing Hella Mega as an example. But for Death Cab frontman Ben Gibbard, this fall's package tour will be an unusual co-headline — one with himself. Shortly before the pandemic, Gibbard had broached the idea of a tour featuring Death Cab and The Postal Service (his one-off project with producer Jimmy Tamborello and singer Jenny Lewis), pegged to the 20th anniversaries of their respective 2003 classics, *Transatlanticism* and *Give Up*, to Kurland and longtime agent Trey Many of Wasserman. "It took a little while to settle in, and then as we started seeing this trend, touring these packages, we're like, 'Holy shit, this is a great idea,' " Kurland says.

The tour announcement earned an immediate and passionate response as elder millennials cheered the sentimental bill — Gibbard will play the entirety of both albums at a mix of arenas, amphitheaters and theaters — and younger fans delighted in the opportunity to see The Postal Service, which has only toured twice (in 2003 and 2013) for the first time. But while the rare Postal Service outing, along with Death Cab's decision to play *Transatlanticism*, make this tour unique, the latter band has, through reliable performances and consistent releases (including 2022's acclaimed *Asphalt Meadows*, which yielded the Alternative Airplay No. 1 "Here to Forever"), cultivated the kind of loyal live following that transcends nostalgia. When Death Cab played Denver-area Red Rocks Amphitheatre in September 2021, "there were a lot of high school kids," Kurland recalls. "Death Cab has now become a band that gets handed down, whether it's from parents or older siblings. The band is still finding new people."

"Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, boomers; it's a little bit of everybody," Many adds. "Death Cab has continued to gain those younger fans as they continue to work and play great shows and make great records."

That may ultimately be the key to touring longevity for rock's new classics. Acts like Weezer, blink-182 and Death Cab have matured without sacrificing creative vitality or commercial relevance; by comparison, consider Billy Joel, who hasn't released a rock album since 1993 but still tours a beloved catalog that spanned 22 years in stadiums and arenas, or other peers whose token new songs have long been derisively classified as fodder for bathroom breaks.

"Songs will outlast any sort of genre spike," Many says. "Great songs go beyond the initial scene that maybe helped make them popular."

"These catalogs have always stood the test of time," notes Live Nation's Ackles. "And now, I think you might have more and more of these bands saying, 'Hey, let's go out on a tour.' "

BARKER: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC. GIBBARD: TIM MOSENFELDER/WIREIMAGE. CUOMO: JOHN MEDINA/GETTY IMAGES.

BATTLE FOR THE BOX OFFICE

BUNGLED ON-SALES RENEWED FUROR AT TICKETMASTER. BUT A SLEW OF NEW PLATFORMS ARE GIVING FANS (AND ARTISTS) ALTERNATIVES

BY TAYLOR MIMS

LAST JULY, FANS FUMED over the high cost of Ticketmaster's dynamic pricing — the model that responds in real time to consumer demand and can cause prices to skyrocket, especially at on-sale — for Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band's 2023 tour.

Then, in November, Ticketmaster's presale for Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour sold over 90% of the trek's inventory — breaking the record for the most tickets sold in a single day by a touring artist — but online traffic stranded millions of infuriated fans in digital queues and caused website outages. Ticketmaster canceled the general on-sale for the remaining inventory, and Swift lambasted the company in a statement: "We asked them, multiple times, if they could handle this kind of demand, and we were assured they could. It's truly amazing that 2.4 million people got tickets, but it really pisses me off that a lot of them feel like they went through several bear attacks to get them."

Soon, politicians were calling for accountability, and in January, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on competition within the ticketing industry, including whether the 2010 consent decree governing the merger of Live Nation and Ticketmaster has worked — or if the company has monopolized the sector.

Ticketmaster effectively controls major live-music events in many North American arenas and stadiums: It's the primary ticketing system for 27 out of 32 NFL stadiums and Live Nation-promoted arena shows across the continent. But since its merger with Live Nation, viable alternatives have emerged.

"With ticketing systems, you may not know who they are, and that's a good thing. Frankly, when a ticketing system makes the news, usually something went wrong," says International Ticketing Association president/CEO Maureen Andersen, who adds that millions of tickets for music, sports and other live entertainment are sold every day on various platforms in North America without a hitch.

"There is a lot of ticketing technology available," says Andersen. "A lot of ticketing companies [are] coming to the U.S. to test the waters and see what kind of market share they can get. That rings to me as healthy competition."

Artists looking for ticketing alternatives in 2023 will fare better than Pearl Jam did nearly 30 years ago when the band tried — and failed — to route a tour without using Ticketmaster in protest of the company's service fees. In December, country singer Zach Bryan released his album *All My Homies Hate Ticketmaster (Live at Red Rocks)* — the Denver-area amphitheater is ticketed by AXS, the Ticketmaster rival owned by the second-biggest North American promoter, AEG Presents — and took to social media: "I am so so tired of people saying things can't be done about this massive issue while huge monopolies sit there stealing money from working class people." Within weeks, he announced and sold out a 28-date tour, exclusively ticketed by AXS. "We sold all the tickets in 3 waves to actual fans, we hired teams to limit bots, and we sacrificed a lot of personal things to give real people, real seats," Bryan posted afterward.

And in March, when fees for some dates on The Cure's Ticketmaster-ticketed arena tour exceeded face-value prices, frontman Robert Smith called on the company to correct the matter — which it did in short order, issuing $10 credits to many purchasers.

Ticketing platforms in both the primary and secondary markets — which facilitate sales from rights holders and resale from other consumers, respectively — are experimenting with new features and working to keep prices in check. *Billboard* highlights some of the notable companies increasing competition in the sector.

THE COMPETITION

AXS • PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MARKETS

FOUNDED 2011

THE GIST Ticketmaster's most significant U.S. competitor duplicates many of Ticketmaster's strengths, including its ability to handle high-volume on-sales and a lottery system called Fair AXS. (AEG previously licensed Ticketmaster technology as a condition set by the U.S. Department of Justice in its approval of the 2010 Live Nation-Ticketmaster merger, but used other software to build AXS.) Following the 2019 merger of AEG Facilities and SMG, AEG now owns, manages or operates more than 350 venues, many of which use AXS for ticketing.

CashorTrade • SECONDARY

FOUNDED 2009

THE GIST With roots in the jam-band community, CashorTrade eschews a first-come, first-served model, instead allowing buyers to plead their case to sellers, who are required to upload receipts to prove they're selling at face value. Buyers can't offer more than face value for tickets but can "creatively barter," most often by pitching trades of other concert tickets or artist merchandise, in order to be selected. After The Cure's tour went on sale, the band publicly endorsed CashorTrade and Twickets, a U.K.-based resale platform operating in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, for resale of its tickets.

DICE • PRIMARY

FOUNDED 2014

THE GIST DICE entered the U.S. market in 2019 with a bold promise: to help eradicate scalping. Digital tickets are locked to a buyer's smartphone, and back-end technology prevents the resale of tickets above face value. DICE also blocks tickets from the secondary market by allowing fans to return them to sold-out shows, which are then redistributed to customers on waitlists.

Lyte • SUPPLEMENTARY

FOUNDED 2013

THE GIST Lyte works with primary ticketing platforms to eliminate scalping and get in-demand tickets to actual fans. Partners like See Tickets integrate Lyte's technology to field ticket requests and credit card information prior to on-sales, allowing fans to return tickets that are then offered to preregistered fans at fair market price (which can exceed face value).

SeatGeek • PRIMARY, SECONDARY

FOUNDED 2009

THE GIST SeatGeek established itself as a secondary ticketer similar to resale giant StubHub — and continues to expand its reach in that market, including through new resale deals with MLB and college-athletics ticketing giant Paciolan — but has since become the primary ticketer for a handful of NFL and NBA teams, Broadway theaters and other venues. (Major League Soccer and Brooklyn's Barclays Center recently ended partnerships with SeatGeek in favor of Ticketmaster.) The ticketer also introduced SeatGeek Swap in 2021, which allows the return of eligible tickets, no questions asked, for credit at 100% of the purchase price.

See Tickets • PRIMARY, SECONDARY

FOUNDED 1991

THE GIST Since opening a Los Angeles office in 2014, the U.K.-based ticketer has steadily grown, including working with boutique North American festivals and independent clubs and theaters. After becoming a National Independent Venue Association sponsor in 2020, See signed deals with 100 new indie venues and promoters in a 12-month period. The platform's tools include fan-to-fan resale technology.

ILLUSTRATION BY PETE RYAN

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CONGRATULATES

Pierre Hachar, Jr., Esq. & Cody Pellicer, Esq.

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Allen Grubman and everyone at
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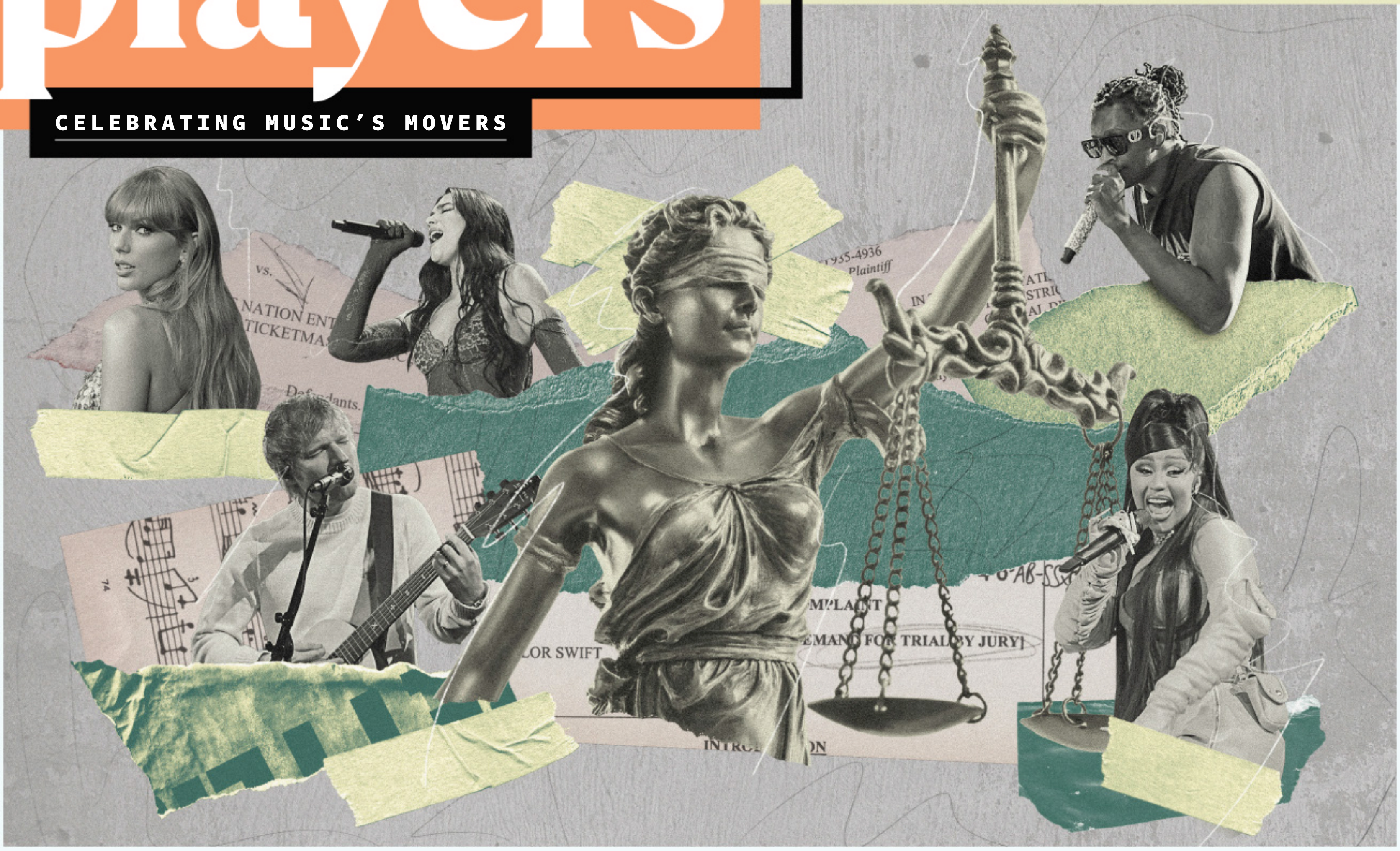

2023 TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

The best attorneys in the business are defending the rights of their clients, negotiating smart deals — and warily watching the rise of artificial intelligence

ILLUSTRATION BY MARA OCEJO

Clockwise from left: Swift, Lipa, Young Thug, Cardi B and Sheeran. They were among the stars who were involved in significant legal proceedings in the past year.

WHEN ARTISTS, songwriters or music business executives face a legal challenge, they can't just shake it off.

Sometimes they need a good attorney. *Billboard*'s 2023 class of Top Music Lawyers — nominated by their firms and peers, and chosen by our editors — are an essential resource for the music industry's rising artists, songwriters and superstars alike.

In courtrooms and boardrooms, their work last year involved conflicts over some of the hottest hits on the charts, song lyrics — and even tattoos.

Attorneys on this list took part in battles involving the originality of the lyrics to Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off," in a case that was settled in December without a final ruling; Ed Sheeran singing in a London courtroom to successfully prove he didn't steal "Shape of You" from an earlier song; Dua Lipa facing not one but two copyright suits over her smash hit "Levitating," the top Billboard Hot 100 song of 2021; Young Thug and Gunna's indictment in a gang-related case that cited rap lyrics to back state charges; and Cardi B taking the stand to convince a jury to dismiss claims, including privacy violation, from a California man whose back tattoo was Photoshopped onto the cover of her 2016 mixtape, *Gangsta Bitch Music, Vol. 1.*

Catalog sales continued to grow both more popular and richer, as 2023's top attorneys advised on the transfer of publishing or recording rights from creators such as Justin Bieber, Brad Paisley, Sonny Rollins and the estates of Juice WRLD, Leonard Cohen and McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, to name a few.

Clearly, attorneys stay busy. But they also take time to reflect on the broader state of the music business. For this year's Top Music Lawyers report, *Billboard* asked them not only about their clients and achievements but also about the balance of power in our industry and how it might further shift to those who truly drive its success — artists and songwriters.

We also asked attorneys what is the most pressing concern facing the music business in 2023. One topic, which was hardly mentioned a year ago, came up repeatedly: the rise of generative artificial intelligence, a technology that can create new content by drawing from existing data.

"Because the music industry was built substantially on the creative contribution from recording artists and songwriters, the concern is that AI-generated songs could take up space in the competitive market for music consumption and replace career artists," says Craig Marshall, an equity partner of Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light. "This also gives rise to a number of copyright issues that will have to be resolved. After all, copyright statutes were created to incentivize artists to create new works by protecting originality. Now it seems that AI is using that originality to replace human art."

Previn Warren of the law firm Motley Rice expresses his concern succinctly: "This may be an existential moment for artists, not just the industry that supports them."

—BILL DONAHUE AND THOM DUFFY

[illegible] MAURICIO SANTANA/GETTY IMAGES. THUG: CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR BILLBOARD. CARDI B: ABC/GETTY IMAGES. SHEERAN: SCOTT KOWALCHYK/CBS/GETTY IMAGES.

music groups

Jeffrey Harleston
GENERAL COUNSEL/EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Saheli Datta
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER AND EMPLOYMENT COUNSEL, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Steve Gawley
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS AND EAST COAST LABEL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Nicola Levy
EXECUTIVE VP OF DIGITAL BUSINESS AFFAIRS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Alasdair McMullan
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/HEAD OF LITIGATION, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Michael Seltzer
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS FOR BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

In August, the major labels, including UMG, settled a yearslong lawsuit against internet service provider Bright House and its corporate parent, Charter Communications, over the ISP's liability for users uploading copyrighted works without permission — "a good old-fashioned copyright infringement case," Harleston says. "Even in 2023, I think it's important that we reinforce and support the rule of law as it applies to copyright and the artists' ability to be compensated for their work." That will continue, he says, as technology evolves, especially in "the AI discussion." Harleston stresses the importance of "how we address these innovations in a way that's supportive of the music community."

Paul Robinson
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Brad Cohen
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF LITIGATION/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Jon Glass
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF DIGITAL LEGAL AFFAIRS, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

In late 2021, Sony Music Entertainment's legal team oversaw the acquisition of Bruce Springsteen's publishing and master-recording catalog for a reported $500 million.

MAT HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

Maryrose Maness
SENIOR VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Thomas Marcotullio
SENIOR VP/CHIEF COUNSEL, MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS AND CORPORATE LAW, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Trent Tappe
SENIOR VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

In the past year, WMG has renewed licensing agreements with Meta and SoundCloud; expanded with mergers and acquisitions in the United States, the Middle East and India; and won "substantial settlements and jury verdicts in copyright-infringement cases against ISPs," Robinson says. But the biggest change was at the top of the company, as Robert Kyncl replaced Stephen Cooper. "Most of all, we're proud of working with our board to ensure a smooth and efficient CEO search and transition process," Robinson adds.

Julie Swidler
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/GENERAL COUNSEL, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Stu Bondell
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Wade Leak
EXECUTIVE VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE, ETHICS AND PRIVACY OFFICER, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Jeff Walker
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, GLOBAL DIGITAL BUSINESS, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Susan Meisel
SENIOR VP/CORPORATE DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Jennifer Womack
SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, FILM, TELEVISION AND PODCASTS, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Over the past 18 months, Sony's legal team oversaw two major deals: the late-2021 acquisition of Bruce Springsteen's publishing and master-recording catalog for a reported $500 million and the acquisition of the distribution and artists services company AWAL from Kobalt in a deal worth some $430 million, which received final regulatory approval in May. Swidler says of Springsteen: "This is an artist who has been with Columbia for his entire career and wants his legacy and future to stay with Columbia." On the AWAL transaction, she adds, "It's just one more opportunity for us to give artists different ways of engaging with us."

streaming

Kevan Choset
VP/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/HEAD OF LEGAL STRATEGY, SPOTIFY

Sofia Sheppard
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/HEAD OF GLOBAL LICENSING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, SPOTIFY

Darren Schmidt
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/GLOBAL HEAD OF LABEL LICENSING, SPOTIFY

Lucy Bridgwood
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL OF GLOBAL PUBLISHING, SPOTIFY

Spotify's legal team helped broker a settlement between major music streaming services and publishers and songwriters that set streaming royalty rates through 2027, "providing rate stability and avoiding another Copyright Royalty Board trial," says Sheppard. The team is concerned with helping artists build their careers when all streaming platforms collectively are ingesting over 100,000 tracks daily — and rising. "I believe that this makes it critical for platform providers and rights holders to work together," Sheppard says, "to provide artists, songwriters and users with the best possible discovery experiences."

The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...

> "It has already happened. Over the last six years, as a result of how the streaming economy has heightened competition for signings, artists and songwriters are seeing higher advances, higher royalty rates, lower delivery commitments and shorter rights retentions."
>
> —PAUL ROBINSON, WARNER MUSIC GROUP

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congratulates our colleagues and fellow honorees for their recognition in

Billboard's 2023 "Top Music Lawyers" list!

Eric German
Partner, Los Angeles

Gabriella Nourafchan Ismaj
Partner, Los Angeles

Christine Lepera
Partner, New York

Jeffrey Movit
Partner, New York

Bradley Mullins
Partner, Los Angeles

David Steinberg
Partner, Los Angeles

Matthew Williams
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In February, to mark the announcement that Sting will be named a fellow of The Ivors Academy, Amazon Music exclusively released a demo of his track "If It's Love" from his 2021 album, *The Bridge*.

Gabe Fleet

EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/CHIEF MUSIC LICENSING COUNSEL, IHEARTMEDIA

As more industry attention turned toward the metaverse during the past year, Fleet led negotiations for iHeartMedia music licensing and strategy opportunities that included an iHeart-branded entertainment space in Fortnite, an iHeart world in Roblox and a partnership with Super League Gaming. The moves were part of an effort to help iHeart adapt to a changing digital ecosystem, says Fleet. "We have to find a way for services to be meaningfully profitable while also fairly compensating creators and copyright owners."

Antonious Porch

GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER, SOUNDCLOUD

Ama Walton

SENIOR VP OF MUSIC LICENSING AND PARTNERSHIPS, SOUNDCLOUD

SoundCloud's acquisition of AI company Musiio in early 2022 was a game-changer, according to Porch. The purchase both amplified the company's existing music intelligence capabilities and allows "further leverage of the platform's vast data to identify what's next in music trends and talent," says Porch. Musiio's business-to-business audio referencing search (that "listens" to music) and its automated tagging and playlist tools will help SoundCloud identify talent and trends early, adds Porch. Walton worked on the company's fan-powered royalties (FPR) to oversee a more transparent option for artists to monetize directly on the platform and led the legal team on negotiations for SoundCloud's global licensing deal with Warner Music Group — the first major-label rights holder for the FPR payout model. Over 150,000 artists on the platform have been using the FPR system since the signing, with independent artists experiencing a near 60% increase in rates than with the traditional pro rata model, according to SoundCloud.

Robert Windom

CHIEF COUNSEL, CONTENT AND SERVICES, APPLE

Elizabeth Miles

SENIOR LEGAL DIRECTOR, ITUNES AND APPLE MUSIC, APPLE

As leading attorneys at Apple, Windom and Miles share in the company's recent accomplishments, from Apple Music's partnership with the NFL for Rihanna's Super Bowl Halftime Show on Feb. 12 to the rise of the company's immersive spatial audio product. In announcing the company's results on Feb. 6 for the first fiscal quarter of 2023, Apple CEO Tim Cook revealed that it had reached a new milestone with over 2 million active devices in its installed user base, while its services business set a new revenue record of $20.8 billion. Apple services include Apple Music and the company's other digital content: books, video, games and podcasts.

Stephen Worth

ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/HEAD OF LEGAL, AMAZON MUSIC

Cyrus Afshar

ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL, AMAZON MUSIC

Nicolas Gauss

Jon Cohen

SENIOR CORPORATE COUNSELS, AMAZON MUSIC

While streaming platforms promote recording artists by default, Amazon Music is highlighting the work of songwriters through a global sponsorship with The Ivors Academy, the U.K. association for music creators, and plans to release live performances and interviews on its Amazon Music U.K. Twitch channel. In February, to mark the announcement of Sting being named an academy fellow of The Ivors — its highest honor — Amazon Music exclusively released a demo of Sting's track "If It's Love" from his 2021 album, *The Bridge*. "In the coming years, our team will work hard to help advance the work of The Ivors, one of the world's top songwriter associations," says Cohen.

live

Michael Rowles

EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, LIVE NATION ENTERTAINMENT

Rowles points to Live Nation's acquisition of Mexican concert promoter OCESA and integration of its business as "a big focus over the past year-and-a-half as we continue to expand globally to better serve artists and their fans." The deal had been put together in 2019, then "got delayed for obvious reasons," he says, "so finally getting the chance to successfully close the transaction and combine our businesses has been huge." Looking at the broader issues facing the industry, Rowles says: "Artists need the ability to set the rules on how their tickets get to their fans. We're already seeing laws strip their control away, giving scalpers more power. We recently launched fair-ticketing reforms with support from other top artist coalitions, managers, music labels and agencies to advocate for artists deciding the rules on how their tickets can be sold, transferred and resold. We're doing everything we can to advocate for better laws for the sake of artists and fans across the country."

Shawn Trell

COO/EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, AEG PRESENTS

Trell is more than an attorney for AEG Presents, the promotion arm of Anschutz Entertainment Group. As COO, executive vp and the company's top lawyer, he oversees new club construction, including spearheading the development of a 3,500-seat venue in Raleigh, N.C., with Kane Realty to serve as a flagship property in the fast-growing state.

publishing

Peter Brodsky

EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/GENERAL COUNSEL, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Michael Abitbol

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF U.S. DIGITAL, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Nicole Giacco

Jonas Kant

SENIOR VPs OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Sony Music Publishing's legal team closed numerous landmark deals and renewals with hit-making writers in the last year, including Ashley Gorley, Tainy, Anitta, Ryan Tedder, Danger Mouse and Måneskin. The team also expanded the major publisher's reach worldwide over the last year. "I'm excited that SMP has opened offices in emerging markets such as India and Nigeria," says Giacco. "Just as Spanish-language songs have become more mainstream in the U.S., I look forward to learning new music with regional influences and seeing those songs reach even more listeners." Next up? Giacco and her colleagues are finding ways to protect their songwriters as generative AI technology becomes mainstream. "It is important we evolve with new technologies like AI," she says.

Angelica Merida

VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL AND DIGITAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

Kerrigan Hennings

Ira Hoffman

VPs OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

Don Glista

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS AND CREATIVE AFFAIRS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

The lawyers at UMPG are proud to have closed numerous major agreements in the past year. "Our team has worked on deals for The Weeknd, the Juan Gabriel estate, Univision, the Elvis Presley estate, Neil Diamond and the Frank Zappa estate, just to name a few," says Merida. The team is also paying close attention to AI: "With the broader adoption of music-centric AI," she says, "it is more important than ever to ensure that the value of songwriters' and artists' creative contributions continues to be recognized and protected."

Peter Rosenthal

EXECUTIVE VP/GLOBAL HEAD OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Steve Butler

SENIOR VP OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

CHARLEY GALLAY/GETTY IMAGES

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CONGRATULATIONS

Greenberg Traurig applauds our colleagues, **Jay Cooper, Steve Plinio, Jess Rosen, Bobby Rosenbloum, Mathew Rosengart,** and **Paul Schindler** for being named to the *Billboard* 2023 Top Music Lawyers list.

We celebrate your dedication to the entertainment industry and your clients.

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Rosenthal and Butler have led the legal teams at Warner Chappell to think global. "We've worked hard to unify and increase collaborations," says Rosenthal. "This has led to highly impactful deals, including our acquisition of beloved Spanish artist Joaquín Sabina's publishing catalog and our worldwide administration agreement with Mosaert, the independent creative label and publishing company founded by Belgian singer-songwriter-composer Stromae." In addition, the executives helped to establish legal policies and strategies for Warner Chappell's Web3 efforts including the company's launch of Archives, a blockchain-powered digital museum that spotlights songs, and its partnership with Defient, a Web3 entertainment company.

rights organizations

Christos Badavas

EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, SESAC MUSIC GROUP

Badavas and his team "operate in an increasingly global legal and business affairs environment," encompassing performing rights, licensing and administration services, sonic brands and specialty music, he says. Last year, SESAC expanded Mint, its international online licensing joint venture with SUISA, into Asia. "This fundamental shift in the scope of our department's focus has required us to scale our policies and practices to accommodate the growth," Badavas says. And because of that experience, Badavas also understands the implications of the rise of AI: "We need to make AI work for the creative community," he says.

Tim Dadson

GENERAL COUNSEL, SOUNDEXCHANGE

In June 2022, SoundExchange sued streamer Slacker and its parent company, LiveOne, alleging they had failed to pay millions in royalties and late fees for the use of recordings. In October, the case was decided in U.S. District Court in California in SoundExchange's favor, with the judge ordering Slacker to pay nearly $10 million. The ruling also permanently barred the company from using the statutory license to stream music — an option automatically provided to internet radio companies such as Slacker — forcing it to negotiate direct licenses going forward. Dadson calls the latter move "an unprecedented victory for creators."

Kristen Johns

CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER, THE MECHANICAL LICENSING COLLECTIVE

The Music Modernization Act of 2018 created the Mechanical Licensing Collective to provide an urgently needed means for the blanket mechanical licensing of musical works to music streaming services and download stores. It has since distributed over $1 billion in blanket royalties since April 2021 to more than 25,000 songwriters, composers, lyricists, publishers, administrators and ex-U.S. collective management organizations. "Our organization operates with an unprecedented level of transparency," Johns says, "as demonstrated by the creation of its free, public database of more than 30 million musical works."

Clara Kim

EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS OFFICER, ASCAP

On behalf of ASCAP's "outrageously talented songwriters and composers," Kim says, she has negotiated licenses with top streaming platforms such as YouTube, Netflix and HBO Max in deals that have generated historic levels of revenue. For six consecutive years, ASCAP has reported over $1 billion in distributions. "We're really proud that our concerted licensing efforts are paying off with higher rates for certain performances and resulting in increased royalties paid to ASCAP members year over year," says Kim. On March 8, ASCAP reported a 14% increase in collections to $1.5 billion, while also reporting that its funds available for distribution to songwriters and publishers grew 10.7% to $1.4 billion in 2022.

Stuart Rosen

SENIOR VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, BMI

For its songwriting and composing members, BMI has taken action in federal rate court against the North American Concert Promoters Association in 2018, with court proceedings concluding in late 2022. According to BMI, royalty rates historically paid by the NACPA — which is the licensing representative for promoters including Live Nation and AEG — do not reflect the value that songs bring to live concerts. The litigation, which has yet to be decided, highlights BMI's "commitment to ensuring that our songwriters are fairly compensated for their musical contributions," as songs are the "backbone" of the concert industry, says Rosen. "BMI is seeking a rate that reflects the value that our songwriters and composers bring to the multibillion-dollar live-concert industry, which is more in line with global models," he says, "and captures the various ways the modern concert promotion business monetizes the use of our creators' work."

associations

Danielle Aguirre

EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL, NATIONAL MUSIC PUBLISHERS' ASSOCIATION

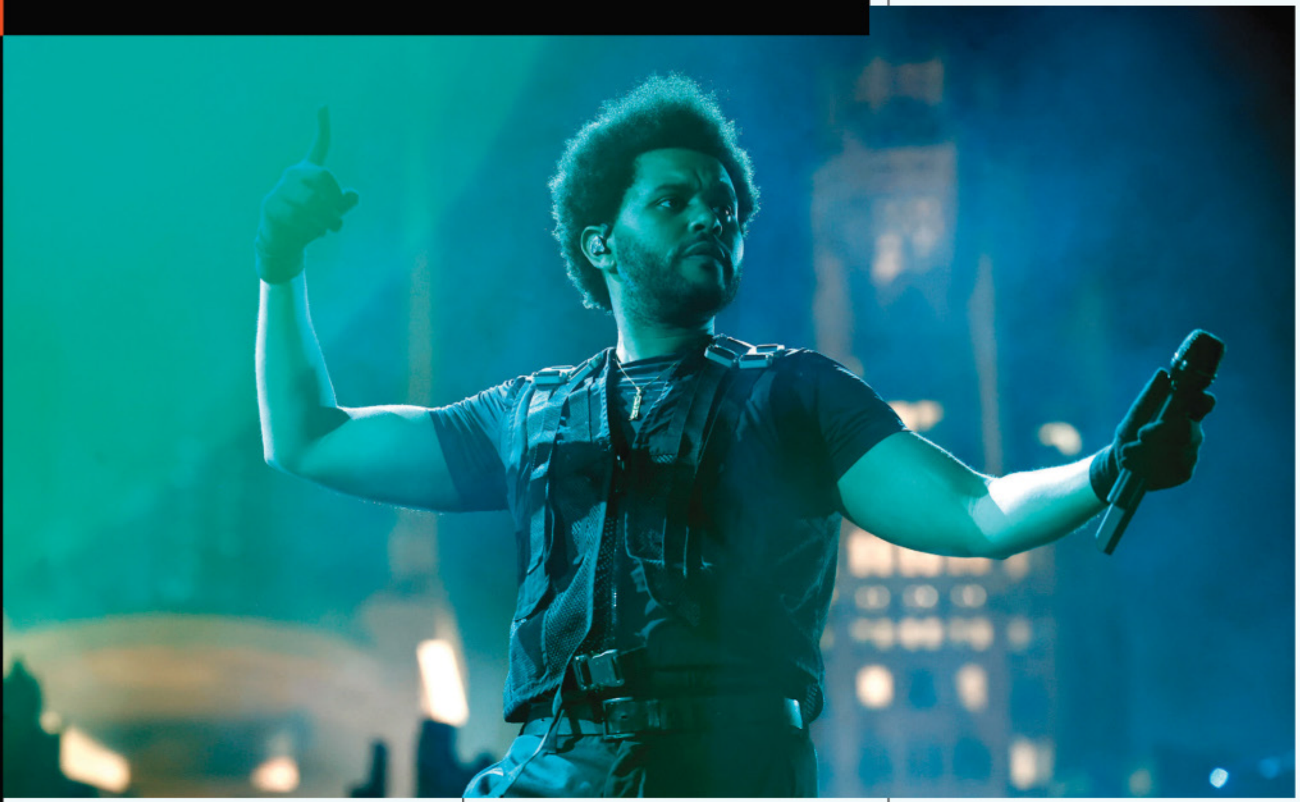
In August, the NMPA and the Nashville Songwriters Association International reached a settlement with music streaming companies in the Phonorecords IV rate proceeding that gave music publishers and songwriters a modest raise in royalty rates for the period of 2023 to 2027. "After seven long years of fighting with these digital music companies," Aguirre says, "we found a way forward that provides the highest rates in the world and the highest rates in history — and will allow us to find new ways to work together to increase the value of songs."

Ken Doroshow

CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER, RIAA

Doroshow has achieved victories in piracy cases that have established "that stream-ripping services unlawfully circumvent technical measures designed to protect copyrighted works," he says. "As piracy continues to evolve and becomes ever more technologically complex, it is critical to reinforce the vitality of bedrock rules like Section 1201's anti-circumvention prohibitions [in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act], which the decisions in ... these cases achieved."

In the past year, the team at Universal Music Publishing Group has worked on deals for The Weeknd, Univision, Neil Diamond and the estates of Juan Gabriel, Elvis Presley and Frank Zappa, just to name a few.



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Ryan McWhinnie

VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, MERLIN

For Merlin's independent music company members, McWhinnie has taken the lead on several major deals at the licensing organization, with digital partners including Apple, Deezer, Meta and Spotify. He has also negotiated premium deals with the business-to-business platform STYNGR and provided music licensing solutions for video games and the metaverse. McWhinnie was also behind a deal with streaming giant FLO, which will help Merlin members reach a new audience in South Korea. Also, "2023 has already highlighted the breakneck speed at which AI continues to develop," says McWhinnie. "While traditionally the competition has been between majors and independents, in the future, it may well be between humans and algorithms."

talent and litigation

Kenneth Abdo
Paul Bowles
Cynthia Katz
Tim Mandelbaum
Michael Reinert
Leron Rogers
Alex Threadgold
Heidy Vaquerano

PARTNERS, FOX ROTHSCHILD

Beginning 35 years ago, in Minneapolis, Abdo built a nationally recognized entertainment law firm that merged with Fox Rothschild in 2017. Over the past 18 months, he has brokered catalog sales, renegotiated or negotiated recording and publishing deals for John Driskell Hopkins (Zac Brown Band), Mick Mars (Mötley Crüe), Three Dog Night, Kool & The Gang, Hanson, Eric B. & Rakim and others. Vaquerano and Katz have advised their client HarbourView Equity Partners on high-profile acquisitions of music catalogs, including works from Incubus, Brad Paisley, Lady A and Sum 41. From the firm's New York office, Mandelbaum has guided the sale of the music publishing catalogs of Shannon Rubicam and George Merrill, including the Whitney Houston hits "How Will I Know" and "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," to Primary Wave. For the estate of McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, Reinert executed a renegotiation with Universal Music Group and an agreement with Sony Music Publishing to take over administration of the icon's catalog, including songs like "Mannish Boy," "Rollin' Stone" and "Got My Mojo Working." Among Rogers' numerous deals in the past year was negotiating a tour deal with Mary J. Blige for the Black Promoters Collective. A former DJ and label executive, Threadgold represents numerous independent labels, distributors and artists. He serves as outside general counsel to VP Records, helping the New York-based label deal with thousands of reggae, dancehall and soca artists. He is also outside general counsel for Symphonic Distribution, helping the digital distributor sign clients and acquire catalog.

Tim Mandelbaum of Fox Rothschild guided the sale of the music publishing catalogs of Shannon Rubicam and George Merrill, including the Whitney Houston hits "How Will I Know" and "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," to Primary Wave.

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

Jenny Afia

PARTNER, SCHILLINGS INTERNATIONAL

A leading privacy and reputation lawyer, Afia has a client list that includes Madonna, Adele, Elton John and Johnny Depp, but she highlights her recent crisis management for a performer, whose identity she could not disclose, who was the subject of false allegations that could have severely affected the artist's reputation and career. "Whilst the entirely unjust situation was emotionally scarring, thankfully justice prevailed and their career and fan base are deservedly intact," she says. In 2021, Afia led the team that won a London High Court privacy case for Meghan Markle against Associated Newspapers and successfully defended the Duchess of Sussex's victory on appeal.

Lisa Alter
Katie Baron

PARTNERS, ALTER KENDRICK & BARON

Alter and Baron handled over $3 billion in star-studded music acquisition deals during the past year-and-a-half, frequently for their client Primary Wave, including agreements for the works of Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger of The Doors (for an undisclosed amount), Joey Ramone (for a reported $10 million) and James Brown (for a reported $90 million). Alter says the industry's biggest challenge is "increasing consolidation of content ownership in the music space," predicting a shrinking group of catalog owners could "cause a seismic shift in the balance of power."

Jonathan Altschul

FOUNDING ATTORNEY, THE ALTSCHUL FIRM

Altschul recently negotiated a "bespoke agreement between Warner Records and SM Entertainment" for the rights to K-pop girl group aespa's new releases outside Asia, he says. "The unique structure of the agreement provided the resources that helped result in a No. 3 album debut on the Billboard 200," says Altschul, referring to the group's second release, *Girls*. "I also helped negotiate the agreement that led to aespa making its U.S. performance debut on the main stage at Coachella" in 2022.

Ken Anderson
Jill Berliner
Ray Garcia

PARTNERS, RIMON

"We continue to represent a number of prominent and marquee artists in all aspects of their careers, including numerous Grammy winners and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees," says Anderson, who continues to serve as general counsel and litigation supervisor to iconic acts including Beastie Boys, The Chicks and Ben Folds, as well as the estates of Mama Cass Elliot and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nominee Warren Zevon. The most pressing concern facing the music industry, says Anderson, is "navigating the minefield of royalty transparency and fairness in streaming, subscriptions and international affiliate royalty retention. Digital exploitation is to the 2020s what record clubs were to the 1990s."

Peter Anderson

PARTNER, DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE

Anderson — whose clients include The Weeknd, Mariah Carey, Sam Smith and the three major music groups — obtained a dismissal, affirmed by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, for Authentic Brands in a case involving "Can't Help Falling in Love," made famous by Elvis Presley. The court ruled that the heirs of songwriter Hugo Peretti couldn't use the termination right in the Copyright Act to regain control of the song. Since the termination right only applies to deals signed by creators themselves, the court said, the termination provision did not apply to the deal that sold away rights to the song. "The Court of Appeals limited those termination provisions to their plain meaning, which is important for future cases interpreting those provisions," Anderson says. "The Court of Appeals also concluded that plaintiffs' interpretation would subvert Congress' intent."

Craig Averill
Jeff Koenig
Joseph Serling
Jeff Worob

PARTNERS, SERLING ROOKS HUNTER McKOY WOROB & AVERILL

One year after negotiating 50 Cent's

SWANSON, MARTIN & BELL, LLP

ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAW

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Attorneys David Beame and Brian Mencher oversaw negotiations for the 2022 Global Citizen festival, which was held Sept. 24 simultaneously in New York's Central Park and Black Star Square in Accra, Ghana, where SZA was a headliner.

appearance during the Super Bowl LVI halftime show in 2022, the firm scored a Super Bowl 2023 win with Jack Harlow's Doritos commercial — a follow-up to his viral Kentucky Fried Chicken partnership and 2022 New Balance collaboration. Of the challenges facing the industry, Koenig is concerned with the incorporation of "AI into the creation process. We could lose the human component that gives music its texture and lasting emotional appeal," he says.

Hector Baldonado
FOUNDER/PRINCIPAL ATTORNEY, THE BALDONADO GROUP

Baldonado's client roster has grown to include the estate of Juice WRLD, rappers Lil Durk and Trippie Redd and several high-level executives. Negotiating a nine-figure catalog earnings sale, multiple label deals and renegotiating record and publishing deals are all familiar territory for him. The next challenge? "AI technology is of serious concern because of deepfakes and the possibility of copyright infringements," says Baldonado.

Christian Barker
EQUITY PARTNER, SHACKELFORD BOWEN McKINLEY & NORTON

Lauren Kilgore
PARTNER, SHACKELFORD BOWEN McKINLEY & NORTON

Lauren Spahn
ATTORNEY, SHACKELFORD BOWEN McKINLEY & NORTON

Barker reports closing over $20 million in deals for the firm in the last year for Grammy Award-winning producer Byron Gallimore, songwriter Benjamin Johnson, country artist Dipper (with Warner Records/Underscore Works) and Cinq Music Group, for which Barker signed on as outside legal counsel. "The major players in the music industry have a sacred responsibility to embrace diversity — of background and of thought," Barker says. And those companies should be "promoting products and projects that inspire consumers to do the same in a positive and forward-thinking manner."

Andrew Bart
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR, CONTENT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT PRACTICE, JENNER & BLOCK

Representing the major music companies, Jenner & Block won a $46.7 million jury verdict against San Marcos, Texas-based ISP Grande Communications Networks, which must pay Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Records and other labels for copyright infringement. The monthlong jury trial in Austin resulted "in a finding of willful infringement and a verdict against an ISP that took a blind eye to massive infringements by its subscribers on its network," says Bart. Jurors found that Grande Communications was legally liable for the copyright infringement of its users and that it owed separate damages for each of the more than 1,400 songs that were pirated on the company's network.

Richard Baskind
HEAD OF MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT, SIMONS MUIRHEAD BURTON

Baskind heads the music team at London-based Simons Muirhead Burton, which worked on the recent management buyout of Primary Talent International from CAA. The surprise decoupling came less than a year after CAA closed the deal for the U.K. booking agency in a $750 million acquisition of parent company ICM Presents. The new deal has Primary Talent, founded in 1990, returning to independent ownership, with more than 450 acts including The 1975, The Cure, Lana Del Rey, Noel Gallagher, Dropkick Murphys and Patti Smith. The firm also works with Sony Music Publishing, Nick Cave, Tom Grennan and management company Closer Artists, which counts George Ezra and James Bay among its clients.

David Beame
Brian Mencher
FOUNDING PARTNERS, BEAME & MENCHER

In 2022, the firm continued to build on the success of 2020's One World: Together at Home and 2021's Global Citizen Live by bringing the Global Citizen festival to New York and Accra, Ghana, on the same day. The September event raised $2.4 billion to help end extreme poverty, with Mencher leading the legal team to oversee global clearance rights, media deals and distribution and intellectual property considerations.

Jeff Becker
CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAW PRACTICE GROUP, SWANSON MARTIN & BELL

With an eclectic client list featuring Grammy-winning poet J. Ivy, singer-songwriter Natalie Jane, Shaquille O'Neal (as music counsel) and the estate of NFL great Walter Payton (name and likeness rights), Becker handles a range of challenges and opportunities. He recently signed producer Dru DeCaro to Position Music following his work on Em

The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...

"...legislators cared more about creative content and less about campaign contributions from DSPs."
—LISA ALTER, ALTER KENDRICK & BARON

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YEARS OF SERVICE
B. Lawrence Watkins
& Associates, PC

Photo Credit: Fashun Rivers of KDRMG

Beihold's "Numb Little Bug." He believes the industry's most pressing issue is "short attention spans caused by short-form content." Virality from a 10-second TikTok clip "often results in audiences and labels wanting instant gratification," he says, then perhaps not engaging with artists beyond one song — or even part of one song.

David Bercuson

FOUNDER, BERCUSON LAW

Bercuson has long repped Luis Fonsi, Julio Iglesias, Gloria Estefan and Miami Sound Machine, as well as entertainers such as Cristina Saralegui, Adamari Lopez and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, but says his most satisfying work is representing Farruko, as well as his management company and his indie label, from the onset of his career through his hit single "Pepas," which spent 26 weeks at No. 1 on Hot Latin Songs. Farruko's success has allowed Bercuson to "negotiate extremely favorable and lucrative artist, distribution and publishing agreements," he says. It dovetails with his desire to educate indie artists, "with respect to their ability to navigate and work within the digital universe for advertising, promotion and marketing of their careers."

Josh Binder
Jeremy Mohr
Paul Rothenberg

FOUNDING PARTNERS,
ROTHENBERG MOHR & BINDER

Working with client Top Dawg Entertainment's TDE label to release SZA's RCA blockbuster *SOS* and the launch of her accompanying tour were among recent high points for the firm. Now based in Beverly Hills, Calif., and New York, it also represents Charlie Puth, Gunna, Logic, Marshmello and Chloe x Halle. Binder says that "free-flowing, unchecked misinformation" and the coming AI onslaught are concerning. "Artists are bombarded with misinformation," he says, "and are often left wondering what's actually true, making it nearly impossible to determine the best direction. And watch out — AI is going to make things much more complicated."

Marina V. Bogorad

PARTNER, GERARD FOX LAW

Bogorad served as lead counsel in one of the music industry's most significant, recent legal battles — representing songwriters Sean Hall and Nathan Butler as they accused Taylor Swift of stealing lyrics to her smash hit "Shake It Off" from an earlier song about "playas" and "haters." The case ended with a settlement in January, but not before Bogorad won a number of surprising mid-case victories that sent the case hurtling toward a trial. "This was an exciting issue to handle because there is a dearth of case law dealing with similarity of lyrics alone, which is what my clients claimed," Bogorad says.

Jason Boyarski
David Fritz

PARTNERS, BOYARSKI FRITZ

Representing an array of musical artists — from Joan Jett, Marc Anthony and Lil Kim to the estates of Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White and Prince — Boyarski and Fritz have a 360-degree view of the industry. "The ease [with] which recording artists can release their own music with do-it-yourself distribution tools makes music discovery as exciting and prevalent as ever," Boyarski says. "However, Spotify tells us that there are over 49,000 new songs added to the service every day, which means great music is sometimes lost in a sea of new music." He adds that the royalty structure to pay artists is convoluted and becoming outdated. "The market-share payment system — versus a system of paying artists an actual portion of subscriber fees based on music use — is an issue that will continue to be debated in 2023."

John Branca
David Lande
David Byrnes

PARTNERS, ZIFFREN BRITTENHAM

As co-executor of the Michael Jackson estate, Branca co-produced and helped finance the Broadway show *MJ*, which opened in February 2022. Branca has also handled major publishing transactions for clients including Brian Wilson, Enrique Iglesias and Fred Durst and assisted in estate management in the sale of Leonard Cohen's music publishing catalog. He represented Primary Wave in its acquisition of the estate of James Brown; advised Authentic Brands Group about its rights to Elvis Presley, including assistance in the *Elvis* film; and negotiated a new distribution deal for the Bee Gees' recording catalog with Capitol Records. Lande — whose clients include Olivia Rodrigo, Beyoncé, Shakira, Rosalía, Jennifer Hudson, BTS (through HYBE), SZA and Pharrell Williams — represented Justin Timberlake in the sale of his music publishing catalog to Hipgnosis for a value reported to be between $85 million and $100 million. With clients including Kelly Clarkson, Travis Scott, Blake Shelton, Pentatonix, Parkwood/Beyoncé, Jeff Bhasker and the estates of Eazy-E, Kurt Cobain, Tom Petty and Mac Miller, Byrnes has worked on deals including representation of Robby Krieger and the Ray Manzarek estate in the sale of their recording, publishing and other interests in The Doors.

Alandis Brassel

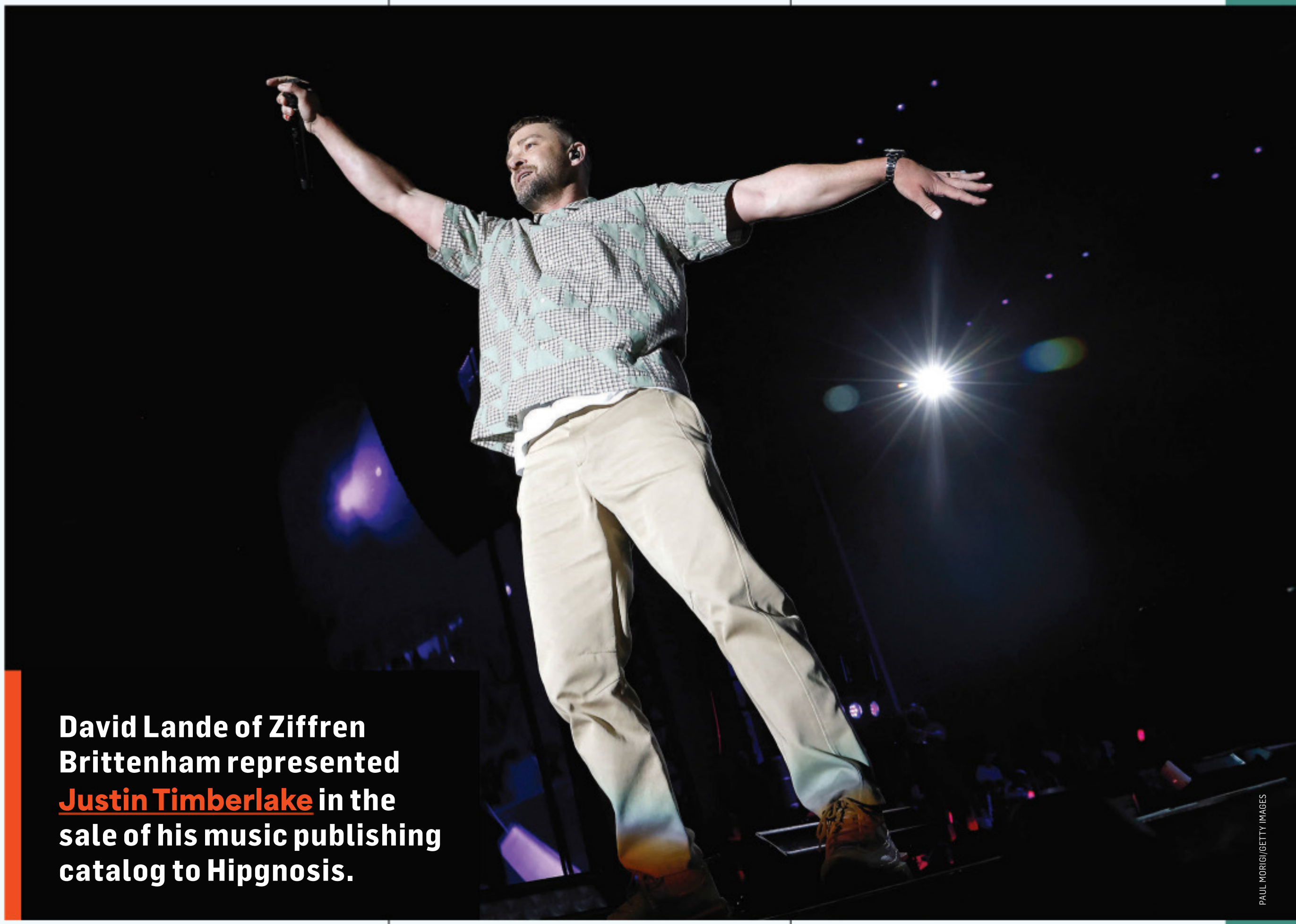
COUNSEL, SCALE

Brassel — whose clients include CMG Records and artists 10Percent, Jordan Occasionally and Bubba Sparxxx — has been focusing on "the issue of equity" in his work, "whether it's negotiating equitable deals for artist and songwriter clients, advocating for equitable royalty share and distribution for legacy artists or serving on the board of Nashville Music Equality and teaching in the Sony Black Music Certification Program." He's looking to apply that same foresight to "evolving technologies AI and Web3 to enhance the creators' bottom line and the fan experience."

William J. Briggs II

PARTNER, VENABLE

Along with representing A-list clients like Stevie Wonder, Gucci Mane, DaBaby and Anita Pointer, Briggs has spent much of the last year representing "several celebrities — none named above — in high-stakes extortion matters, some of which [were] resolved with the assistance of law enforcement," says Briggs. Looking forward to the future, Briggs says the music industry's next battle is "reversion of masters to artists and artists' control of content."



David Lande of Ziffren Brittenham represented Justin Timberlake in the sale of his music publishing catalog to Hipgnosis.

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Jo Brittain
Simon Esplen
Chris Gossage
Gavin Maude
John Reid
Steven Tregear

PARTNERS, RUSSELLS

The London-based firm counts Coldplay, Glass Animals and the estate of George Michael among its clients. Russells, which was established in 1974, has represented many veteran artists since the start of their careers. In the last year, it has acted on behalf of several of the industry's most important companies, including Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, BMG, Kobalt and Sony Music Publishing. "Our work for these clients is wide-ranging commercial, corporate acquisitions and litigation work," says Gossage, who heads a specialist team that oversees catalog and music rights sales. He says that side of the business remains healthy heading into 2023, "although it will face issues linked to the industry's increased exposure to more general economic pressures."

Sandra Brown
Alan Clarke
Jerry Juste
Kendall Minter

OF COUNSEL, GREENSPOON MARDER

Greenspoon Marder is one of the firms representing the estate of Biz Markie in a case against the late rapper's former manager, Jennifer Izumi, alleging trademark infringement and fraud, and theft of song royalties. (Izumi, in a statement, said she "vehemently" denied the allegations and looked forward to proving them "completely false and defamatory.") Greenspoon Marder also represents Lecrae, Philadelphia-based rapper 2Rare and producer-songwriter Dernst "D'Mile" Emile, among others. Brown says the growing use of AI could become a major concern for music creators: "Will AI-created music replace producers, songwriters and artists?"

Vernon Brown

CEO/PRESIDENT, V. BROWN & COMPANY

Brown maintains a formidable client list boasting Cash Money, Epic Records artist Pyrex and Republic Records producer ATL Jacob, who enjoyed success in 2022 after netting a Hot 100 chart-topper with Future's "Wait for U," featuring Drake and Tems. Despite Jacob's prominent rise, Brown hopes budding producers can receive better payouts. "One of the most pressing concerns is fairness in artist and producer royalty agreements and payouts," he says. "The current system is not beneficial to the creatives." He also believes the scales would tip toward performers if digital service provider payments "were structured in a manner that was more favorable to new artists."

Ed Buggé

PARTNER, HERTZ LICHTENSTEIN YOUNG & POLK

Ken Hertz
Jamie Young

NAMED PARTNERS, HERTZ LICHTENSTEIN YOUNG & POLK

With clients including Apple, Céline Dion, Gwen Stefani, Fleetwood Mac and Perry Farrell, the firm spent the last 18 months counseling on issues related to music, technology, dealmaking and touring, Buggé says. In addition to advising on catalog sales of both iconic and new recording artists that fetched prices in the range of eight and nine figures, the firm also provided counsel on the launch of music and media startups related to gaming, the metaverse, virtual reality and AI. The firm works with top talent that includes "Will Smith, H.E.R., Keke Palmer, Tom Morello and Melissa Etheridge on new media content, literary, theatrical — including Broadway, audio, film and TV projects," Buggé says.

Richard Busch

PARTNER IN THE LITIGATION SECTION/HEAD OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SECTIONS, KING & BALLOW

Busch represents Eight Mile Style, which controls musical compositions written in part by Eminem, in a copyright infringement action against Spotify involving over 240 musical compositions. The claim alleges some provisions of 2018's Music Modernization Act are unconstitutional. Busch's client portfolio also includes the estates of Robin Williams and George Carlin, as well as comedians Bill Engvall, Andrew "Dice" Clay and George Lopez. He represents the comedians in a lawsuit against Pandora for allegedly infringing their copyrighted literary works by distributing content without obtaining licenses to publicly perform or mechanically reproduce their routines. He's also representing Rick Astley in a suit against Universal Music, Yung Gravy and others for allegedly re-creating Astley's voice on "Betty (Get Money)" without permission.

Matthew Buser

FOUNDER, BUSER LEGAL

Buser negotiated the recording agreement for one of 2022's top breakout acts: the rapper GloRilla, who turned heads with "F.N.F. (Let's Go)" with Hitkidd, reached the Hot 100 top 10 with the Cardi B collaboration "Tomorrow" and inked a deal with CMG/Interscope. Buser also helped rising rapper Destroy Lonely secure his deal with Opium/Interscope, the label started by Playboi Carti. Working across a rangy roster of artists and producers, both veterans and newcomers, Buser's mission remains the same: ensuring that creators are "fully recognized as largely being the driving force behind successful records."

Joe Carlone
Leslie Frank
Marjorie Garcia
Howard King
Scott McDowell
Peter Paterno
Michael Rexford
Jacqueline Sabec
Laurie Soriano

PARTNERS, KING HOLMES PATERNO & SORIANO

Soriano did legal work for Kim Petras in advance of the September release of her collaboration with Sam Smith on "Unholy," which won the Grammy in February for best pop duo/group performance. Sabec sold the catalog of Huey Lewis and the News to Primary Wave and negotiated brand licensing deals for legacy artists including the Jerry Garcia Wellness line of hemp-derived CBD products. Frank and her team handled legal matters for the release of Skrillex's double album release, *Quest for Fire* and *Don't Get Too Close*. Paterno was honored by the Recording Academy with the 2023 Entertainment Law Initiative Service Award during Grammy Week. King reports that he resolved "an eight-figure commission claim against a major rock band and negotiated resolution of multiple disputes between bands and their labels, managers and, sometimes, former bandmates."

Rosemary Carroll
Michael Guido
Elliot Groffman
Rob Cohen
Gillian Bar
Renee Karalian
Ira Friedman
Paul Gutman

PARTNERS, CARROLL GUIDO GROFFMAN COHEN BAR & KARALIAN

Carroll continues to represent "meaningful and important artists who inspire" her, she says, including, among others, Patti Smith, The Strokes, Phoebe Bridgers, Iggy Pop, The Gaslight Anthem, Anohni and Natalie Merchant (the last four of whom are releasing new albums in 2023), as well as Lucinda Williams, who will publish a memoir, *Don't Tell Anyone the Secrets I Told You*, in April. Groffman — who represents Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam, Dave Matthews and Trey Anastasio, among others — saw client Brandi Carlile keep soaring this past year with her historic collaboration with Joni Mitchell at the Newport Folk Festival. He also negotiated newcomer Ben Goldsmith's signing to Sony Nashville. Guido worked

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3. Columbia Law School, Columbia University
NEW YORK
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4. Fordham University School of Law
NEW YORK
ENROLLMENT: 1,150

5. Harvard Law School, Harvard University
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
ENROLLMENT: 1,747

6. New York University School of Law
NEW YORK
ENROLLMENT: 1,413

7. University of California, Berkeley, School of Law
BERKELEY, CALIF.
ENROLLMENT: 1,088

8. University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law
LOS ANGELES
ENROLLMENT: 1,038

9. University of Miami School of Law
MIAMI
ENROLLMENT: 1,077

10. University of Southern California Gould School of Law
LOS ANGELES
ENROLLMENT: 613

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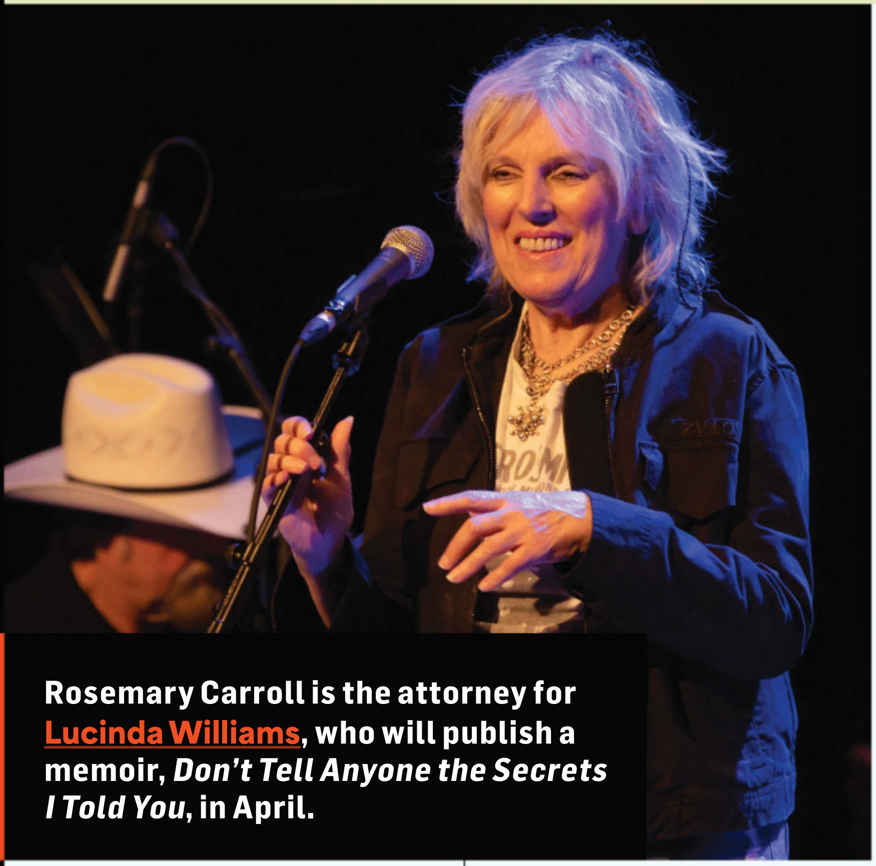

Rosemary Carroll is the attorney for Lucinda Williams, who will publish a memoir, *Don't Tell Anyone the Secrets I Told You*, in April.

FRANK HOENSCH/REDFERNS

with Cohen on the sale of Ultra Records to Sony Music and with Friedman on the sale of 12 Tone Records to Warner Music. Bar's clients include Michael Brun, "a brilliant writer-producer who has worked with J Balvin and Ed Sheeran. Brun is signed to Astralwerks for his own artist project," she says. Karalian negotiated Kid Cudi's tour deal with AEG and the launch of his Moon Man's Landing Festival, in partnership with AEG, in his hometown of Cleveland. Gutman worked with Eric Church on the creation of Solid Entertainment, a company bringing together Church's entrepreneurial ventures, co-launched with his manager, John Peets of Q Prime.

Uwonda Carter
Donald Woodard

FOUNDING PARTNERS, CARTER + WOODARD

Carter + Woodard represented Summer Walker in connection with the release of her sophomore album, *Still Over It,* which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and charted 18 of its songs on the Hot 100. The firm also represented Metro Boomin in connection with the release of *Heroes & Villains*, which also debuted atop the Billboard 200. For client Lil Yachty, Carter + Woodard represented the artist in connection with the release of *Let's Start Here*. The set debuted at No. 1 on Top Rock Albums and Top Alternative Albums — and in the top 10 of the Billboard 200.

Robert A. Celestin

FOUNDING PARTNER, THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

Tiffany Ballard

OF COUNSEL, THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

Alicia Ferriabough-Taylor

JUNIOR PARTNER, THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

Camille Anidi
Chris Wellington

ASSOCIATES, THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

As co-counsel for the estate of Pop Smoke, and representing clients including the estate of XXXTentacion, along with Desiigner, 6ix9ine and Cashmoney AP, Celestin and his team negotiated international distribution for the 2022 Hulu documentary *Look at Me: XXXTentacion*, in addition to the companion documentary and album *In His Own Words: XXXTentacion*. Debuting at No. 1 on the Soundtracks chart, *Look at Me: The Album* also reached No. 17 on the Billboard 200. Among the most critical issues the industry faces today, says Celestin, is lack of artist development. "Record labels exclusively focus on analytics and trends as opposed to developing and nurturing artists to have sustainable careers," he says.

Ross Charap
Matthew Finkelstein

PARTNERS, ARENTFOX SCHIFF

Charap and Finkelstein represent Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones, together with their music publishing company Promopub. They played a key role in the U.S. Copyright Office's recently proposed rule to ensure the Mechanical Licensing Collective pays streaming royalties to artists and songwriters who invoke their termination rights. The proposed new rule is both "fair and imperative," says Finkelstein, who also represented BMG Rights Management in BMG's acquisition of John Legend's music publishing catalog and its acquisition of the late Harry Nilsson's publishing catalog and income streams generated from his recordings.

Jacqueline Charlesworth

PRINCIPAL, CHARLESWORTH LAW

Charlesworth, whose résumé includes a role at the U.S. Copyright Office, focuses on transactional, litigation and policy matters for artists, songwriters, film studios, TV networks, digital companies and trade associations at the firm she founded in 2021. Much of her work focuses on copyright termination. Notes Charlesworth, "Practically every matter I handle involves some issue that Congress didn't consider when enacting the termination provisions, which keeps it interesting."

Stephanie Chopurian

PARTNER, GREENBERG CHOPURIAN-VALENCIA & ASSOCIATES

Chopurian's notable clients include Myke Towers, Arcángel, De La Ghetto, Gerardo Ortiz, Fergie and Ovy on the Drums, who recently produced Karol G's history-making *Mañana Será Bonito*, which debuted atop the Billboard 200 as the first Spanish-language No. 1 album by a female artist. Chopurian's firm was also recently involved in Ovy on the Drums' label deal with Warner Music Latin, Towers' songwriter agreement with ASCAP, Sech's affiliation with BMI and Chencho Corleone's publishing agreement with Warner Chappell. Chief among Chopurian's concerns about the industry is "the failure to recognize the value of the songwriters and producers behind the music artists, because without those songwriters and producers, the artists themselves would not exist."

Jay Cohen

PARTNER, PAUL WEISS RIFKIND WHARTON & GARRISON

Representing clients including Sony Music Entertainment, the National Music Publishers' Association, Grupo Salinas, Charter Communications and ASCAP (the latter for over 25 years), Cohen's recent work has focused largely on creators' efforts to obtain fair pay. This includes ongoing discussions with the Department of Justice to modernize ASCAP's 80-year-old consent decree. Cohen is currently engaged in rate court litigation with the terrestrial radio industry as well, he says, "trying to obtain fair market compensation for creators whose music drives the economics of the radio industry."

Jay Cooper

FOUNDER, LOS ANGELES ENTERTAINMENT PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Steve Plinio

SHAREHOLDER, ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Jess Rosen

CO-CHAIR OF ATLANTA ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Bobby Rosenbloum

CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Mathew Rosengart

SHAREHOLDER, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Paul Schindler

SHAREHOLDER/SENIOR CHAIR OF NEW YORK ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

Greenberg Traurig represents acts including Britney Spears, Katy Perry, Kacey Musgraves, Arcade Fire, Kenny Chesney and Marc Anthony, as well as companies and organizations including Spotify, The Recording Academy, Meta, Lululemon/Mirror, Equinox Media/SoulCycle and Epic Games (and its divisions, Bandcamp, Harmonix and *Fortnite*). In late 2021, Rosengart obtained a court order suspending James "Jamie" Spears as conservator of Britney Spears' estate, ending his 13-year control of his daughter's affairs. Last July, Rosengart obtained a court order defeating James' motion to obtain Britney's deposition while also obtaining a court order compelling James to produce documents and sit for his own deposition. In July and October of last year, he also defeated James' efforts to unseal certain records of Britney's. The court order that Rosengart obtained blocking Britney's deposition, after a contentious hearing, was upheld on appeal in December 2022. The most pressing concern for the music industry, says Rosenbloum, is the complexity of licensing music rights on a global basis. "The fragmentation of music publishing rights among publishers, performing rights organizations and collective management organizations — often on a country-by-country basis — together with the complexity of licensing from these multitude of rights owners/administrators, is continuing to result in billions of dollars being left on the table annually."

Roger Cramer

OF COUNSEL, WINSLETT STUDNICKY McCORMICK & BOMSER

Cramer, who represents five-time Grammy winner Robert Glasper, in addition to rappers Yeat, $NOT and Eem Triplin, says he is "very proud of the work" his team did to release Glasper's guest-heavy *Black Radio 3* (winner of this year's Grammy for best R&B album), as well as three releases by 23-year-old Yeat: *2 Alivë, 2 Alivë (Geëk*

Willkie congratulates partners **Sid Fohrman**, **Shane Nix** and **Alex Weingarten** for being named among **Billboard's 2023 Top Music Lawyers**

Sid Fohrman

Shane Nix

Alex Weingarten

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Covington's global music practice offers integrated transactional, intellectual property, litigation, regulatory, and public policy expertise. We congratulate our colleagues Adrian Perry, Neema Sahni, and Jonathan Sperling for again being recognized by *Billboard* as Top Music Lawyers.

Adrian Perry
aperry@cov.com

Neema Sahni
nsahni@cov.com

Jonathan Sperling
jsperling@cov.com

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Attorney Lawrence Engel of Lee & Thompson advised Harry Styles on all aspects of his Love on Tour worldwide trek.

LLOYD WAKEFIELD

Pack) and EP *Lyfë*. The firm had to negotiate "scores of agreements," Cramer says. *Black Radio 3* alone "required 45 separate agreements to complete delivery. My team works really hard and really well." Triplin has an EP coming in the second quarter of this year. Meanwhile, Cramer emphasizes the need to pay non-mainstream artists "a bigger share of streaming revenue."

Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks
SENIOR PARTNER/CHAIR OF THE FIRM'S ENTERTAINMENT, COPYRIGHT MEDIA PRACTICE GROUP, PROSKAUER
Anthony Oncidi
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW DEPARTMENT/HEAD OF WEST COAST LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT GROUP, PROSKAUER

Proskauer represents clients across the music industry, from The Recording Academy, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group to names like Madonna and Rick Rubin. But among the most significant cases they've handled recently was one brought by a former Live Nation employee, Oncidi says. "We represented Live Nation Entertainment against claims of discrimination, harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination," he says of the case, which was settled early this year. On what are the most pressing concerns companies face today, Crawshaw-Sparks says it's the challenge of figuring out how to embrace technology while stopping "rampant infringement of creative works."

Sy Damle
Andrew Gass
Alli Stillman
Jonathan West
Joe Wetzel
PARTNERS, LATHAM & WATKINS

Latham & Watkins counts among its clients major music companies and organizations including Spotify, Live Nation, Meta, Roblox, Pandora, iHeartMedia, the Digital Media Association, the National Association of Broadcasters and the Digital Licensee Coordinator. (The latter represents the digital music services in the licensing system created by the Music Modernization Act.) The firm represented Spotify in connection with the litigation and settlement negotiations over the price for mechanical rights for streaming services before the Copyright Royalty Board, "which ultimately resulted in a deal touted by both sides as a significant step forward for the industry," says Gass. Looking ahead, "sorting out the relationship between music rights owners on one hand and the AI sector on the other is the most pressing challenge facing the music industry," says Gass. "As with all conflicts between new technologies and incumbent rights owners, it will be interesting to see how this one ultimately gets resolved."

Doug Davis
FOUNDER, THE DAVIS FIRM

In addition to working with clients Swizz Beatz, LL Cool J, DJ Snake, Kandi Burruss and others during the past year, Davis helped negotiate new leadership roles for Kobalt president/COO Jeannette Perez, Warner Chappell president Ryan Press and RCA Music Group executive vps Carolyn Williams and Karen Lamberton. He believes artists and executives must work closely in the immediate future to prevent major music and tech companies from marginalizing creators: "Without a collective intervention by the advocates representing the creators," says Davis, "the corporate interests will steamroll the future of creatives and their heirs for greater quarterly profits."

Scott A. Edelman
CHAIRMAN, MILBANK
Atara Miller
PARTNER, MILBANK

The firm represented BMI in a five-week trial in federal rate court last fall against the North American Concert Promoters Association — the licensing representative for Live Nation and AEG, among others — to reset the rates paid to songwriters for the performance of their music at live concerts. "The prior rates were first negotiated in the mid-1990s and were never adjusted to reflect the dramatic growth of live concerts over the last decade," says Miller. "Live concerts are now a hugely important part of the music industry and incredibly profitable. Songwriters should get their fair share of the profits." The most pressing concern facing the music industry? "Finding ways to monetize music," says Miller, "that allow new, developing and established songwriters and artists to earn a living wage."

Scott Edelman
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT AND TECHNOLOGY PRACTICE GROUP, GIBSON DUNN & CRUTCHER
Orin Snyder
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF GLOBAL TRIAL PRACTICE GROUP, GIBSON DUNN & CRUTCHER

In addition to doing work for each of the industry's big three music groups, Edelman scored a major win in March 2022 on behalf of Apple when he secured a rare major summary judgment on the issue of willfulness in three copyright infringement lawsuits relating to Apple's iTunes Store. "The decision in Apple's favor ... marks the first time a court has held on summary judgment that a digital service provider's reliance on contractual representations from content providers can preclude a finding of willful infringement," says Edelman. Meanwhile, Snyder handled matters for major artists including Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and Lady Gaga, the latter of whom he advised in connection with a threatened copyright infringement lawsuit over her 2018 *A Star Is Born* smash "Shallow" — which, to date, has not yet been filed.

Lawrence Engel
HEAD OF MUSIC, LEE & THOMPSON

Lawrence Engel of Lee & Thompson advised Harry Styles on all aspects of his Love on Tour worldwide trek, including arrangements with promoter Live Nation and merchandise contracts with New York-based Merch Traffic. Since launching in September 2021, the 132-date tour — which included a record-grossing 15-night residency at New York's Madison Square Garden — has sold 3.1 million tickets, according to Billboard Boxscore. Scheduled to wrap July 22 in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the tour has earned $401.6 million to date. London-based Engel's other notable clients include Craig David, MNEK, Jessie J and Styles' former One Direction bandmates Liam Payne and Louis Tomlinson.

The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if ...

"... the huge influx of capital by private equity and investment banks is deployed to recapture rights and copyrights from the major music companies for the benefit of creators. We are entering an era where artists, producers and songwriters have never been armed as well as they will be now to fight the majors to retake ownership." – DOUG DAVIS, THE DAVIS FIRM

Congratulations to our partners **Derek Crownover**, **Tiffany Dunn**, **John Frankenheimer** and **Debbie White** and all of our friends honored on *Billboard's* 2023 Top Music Lawyers list.

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We are proud to recognize two of Billboard's 2023 Top Music Lawyers

Page Kelley, Matthew Beckett, Molly Shehan

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BECKETT | SHEHAN | PLC

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R&B / HIP-HOP
POWER PLAYERS

MICHAEL BUCKNER FOR BILLBOARD

Last year, Karl Fowlkes' client BLXST stormed the Hot 100's top 10 as a featured vocalist on Kendrick Lamar's "Die Hard."

Tim Epstein
PARTNER, DUGGAN BERTSCH

As the independent concert industry's top lawyer, Epstein is constantly working on behalf of his 1,000-plus clients, reviewing booking agreements for festivals, representing promoters in disputes and negotiating contracts for acquisitions and mergers. Last year, he put together the Suenos Deal on behalf of Baja Beach Festival with C3 Presents, creating Chicago's largest Latin festival at Grant Park, where Lollapalooza is held. He also represented Life Is Beautiful when *Billboard* parent company Penske Media Corporation purchased the event. He says his biggest concern in 2023 is getting artists more involved with promotion. "We need help from the artist selling soft tickets and have tried mandating social media minimums in our contracts," Epstein says, adding that agents and managers are hesitant to mandate social media promotion from their clients. "The artists need to do more to promote the festivals they are performing at in order to protect the live ecosystem."

Paul M. Fakler
PARTNER, MAYER BROWN

Fakler is a go-to lawyer for digital music services' royalty rate-setting disputes before the Copyright Royalty Board and federal courts, counting SiriusXM, Music Choice and Google among his client roster. Fakler's biggest case right now pits his client Pandora against stand-up comedians who say they deserve a new stream of spoken-word royalties. Though not specifically a music case, Fakler predicts that the outcome "will have a significant impact on all music streaming services and record companies."

Ilene S. Farkas
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION AND MUSIC LITIGATION PRACTICES, PRYOR CASHMAN
James G. Sammataro
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE, PRYOR CASHMAN
Frank P. Scibilia
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND THE COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION, MUSIC LITIGATION AND MUSIC TRANSACTIONS PRACTICES, PRYOR CASHMAN
Benjamin K. Semel
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE, PRYOR CASHMAN
Brad D. Rose
PARTNER/CHAIR OF THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY GROUP, PRYOR CASHMAN
Donald S. Zakarin
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE LITIGATION AND MUSIC GROUPS AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE, PRYOR CASHMAN

Pryor Cashman advises all of the major labels and publishing companies, plus several major artists, including Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran and Megan Thee Stallion. But it was the matters on which they advised the NMPA and the Nashville Songwriters Association International that Farkas says "were two of the most economically consequential proceedings in the music industry." In the first remand proceeding, known as Phonorecords III, Pryor Cashman lawyers fought to obtain and uphold a rate increase for the mechanical streaming rates that songwriters and publishers received. In the second, Phonorecords IV, Farkas says, "We were able to negotiate a landmark settlement with the interactive streaming services — the first such settlement since 2012 — on the eve of trial, obtaining a further increase to the statutory rates."

Sidney Fohrman
Alex Weingarten
PARTNERS/CHAIRS, WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER
Shane Nix
PARTNER, WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER

During the past 18 months, Willkie Farr & Gallagher have been working with a startup venture, backed by the holding company IAC, "in connection with the development of a digital marketplace for the buying and selling of securitized music assets on a regulated, public exchange," says Fohrman. The firm represents Selena Gomez, Jamie Spears and TikTok, among others. The most pressing concern for the music industry? "The fact that most recording artists and writers do not make a living wage," he says. "We, as an industry, should work collaboratively to ensure that all music industry stakeholders — from artists, writers, labels and publishers to distributors and companies innovating music use — all thrive during these times of unprecedented music creativity and consumption."

Karl Fowlkes
FOUNDER, THE FOWLKES FIRM

Last year, Fowlkes client BLXST stormed the Hot 100's top 10 as a featured vocalist on Kendrick Lamar's "Die Hard"; this year, clients Synthetic and mcvertt reached similar heights as producers on Lil Uzi Vert's energetic single "Just Wanna Rock." Fowlkes also negotiated Synthetic's co-publishing deal with 10K Publishing and Universal Music Group Publishing, plus helped Synthetic build its own publishing company, Hologram, which has signed nearly a dozen producers. Fowlkes says, "The Fowlkes Firm has shone as a producer-focused law firm empowering producers to step out of the shadows and build sustainable businesses."

John Frankenheimer
CHAIR, MUSIC INDUSTRY, LOEB & LOEB
Derek Crownover
Debbie White
VICE CHAIRS, MUSIC INDUSTRY, LOEB & LOEB
Tiffany Dunn
PARTNER, LOEB & LOEB

The firm negotiated a catalog sale and go-forward deal with Sony Music Publishing and Domain Capital Group for Ashley Gorley, who has written or co-written for Carrie Underwood, Bon Jovi, Blake Shelton and Dan + Shay. Sony Music Publishing is one of Loeb's corporate clients, along with Warner Music Group and Big Loud, while also serving acts such as Underwood, BTS, Morgan Wallen and Diana Ross. "The music industry continues to face challenges related to the changing nature of music consumption," says Frankenheimer. "The rise of streaming services and the potential of [non-fungible tokens (NFTs)], the metaverse and related valuation issues have disrupted traditional revenue models and raised questions about how artists and songwriters are compensated for their work."

Adam C. Freedman
FOUNDER, THE LAW OFFICES OF ADAM C. FREEDMAN

Freedman's clients include DJs Subtronics

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us to be a part of your journey*

We also want to thank all our partners and associates.

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in our eyes

Paul Gutman (Partner) • Ira Friedman (Partner)
Leah Seymour • Dave Keady • Jenna Akemi Kon • Celine Hollenbeck
Matthew Sereno • Rawan Ezzo • Riad deFreitas • Jared Leon
Ari Bressman • Sam Fein • Lily D'Olimpio

Rosemary, Michael, Elliot, Rob, Gillian & Renee

and AC Slater, music video producer and artist Glassface, director and photographer Louieknows, producer Einer Bankz and event promoter Space Yacht. He recently helped Steve James sell the rights to his publishing and recording catalogs and also closed publishing deals for several producers, including Bankz (Polo G's Hot 100 No. 1 "Rapstar"). Among pressing issues, Freedman notes "how difficult it is for independent artists and producers to simply get paid for the work they've done. Meanwhile, labels and publishers, especially the majors, don't seem to be [investing in] making it any easier."

Sasha Frid
Louis "Skip" Miller
PARTNERS, MILLER BARONDESS
Frid marked a string of legal victories in 2022, including a jury verdict on behalf of Virtual Sonics and its founders, Jeremy and Julian Soule, who were sued by former investors Scott and Skyler Mednick when they claimed they were owed millions in deferred compensation. "The jury returned a verdict in less than an hour, agreeing with our clients that the Mednicks got everything they were owed when they sold their interests to the company," says Frid. Virtual Sonics, which specializes in developing digital music instruments, is part of a diverse client roster at Miller Barondess. The firm also represents Mötley Crüe, Smokey Robinson, Backstreet Boys and Five Finger Death Punch, among others.

Jeffrey B. Gandel
FOUNDER, JEFFREY B. GANDEL
The Electric Zoo's lead outside counsel for the music festival's entire 15-year history, Gandel's client list also includes artists such as Acraze and Warren Haynes, and producers Gordo (Drake) and Angel Lopez (Jack Harlow). Among other recent feats, Gandel negotiated Acraze's 2022 deal with Capitol Music Group and Thrive, while the DJ-producer's "Do It to It," featuring Cherish, snagged licensing deals for over 20 TV, film and commercial placements. Similar synch success happened for Gandel clients Duke & Jones, whose remix of "Jiggle Jiggle" (a collaboration with Louis Theroux) was among TikTok's top songs of 2022.

Eric German
Christine Lepera
Jeffrey Movit
Bradley Mullins
Gabriella Nourafchan Ismaj
David Steinberg
J. Matthew Williams
PARTNERS, MITCHELL SILBERBERG & KNUPP
Dua Lipa hired Lepera and her colleagues — who together form one of the top legal teams in the country for artists and songwriters facing copyright lawsuits — last year to handle two high-profile cases over her smash hit "Levitating," 2021's year-end Hot 100 No. 1 song. The firm also geared up to rep Post Malone in a similar lawsuit over songwriting co-credits for his 2019 hit "Circles," but settled out of court in March. Their biggest win of the year, however, was a major appeals court ruling for Katy Perry that rejected a case regarding her 2014 Hot 100 chart-topper "Dark Horse." Lepera says the case highlights how musicians are "fighting back to preserve their independence and right to create with commonplace expression."

Damien Granderson
Guy Blake
Elizabeth Moody
Colin Morrissey
PARTNERS, GRANDERSON DES ROCHERS
Granderson Des Rochers helped usher K-pop heavyweight HYBE into the hip-hop market in February by handling its purchase of Quality Control, the Atlanta label representing Migos, Lil Baby, City Girls and Lil Yachty. The firm is concerned about the future of AI, says Morrissey, whose clients include rappers SoFaygo, Mike Dimes and MadeinTYO: "The complete uncertainty for creators, distributors and tech companies is sure to cause chaos." But he adds that traditional label models are "less necessary than ever" and, increasingly, "artists have freedom to get their art to the public."

Navarro Gray
FOUNDING PARTNER, THE GRAY LAW FIRM
The Gray Law Firm recently handled contracts associated with Ronald Isley's latest releases and album, *Make Me Say It Again, Girl*, which included features from Beyoncé, 2 Chainz and Earth, Wind & Fire. The firm also represents notable R&B and hip-hop acts DD Osama, Internet Money and Lil Kim. According to Gray, the most pressing concern facing the music industry lies in supplemental income for recording artists. "Signed artists usually receive their advance and do not get additional monies from the label until the label decides to exercise its option," Gray explains. "Independent artists may rely on streaming monies on a month-to-month basis. Regardless if the artist is signed or indie, they need to come up with additional ways to create immediate supplemental revenue."

Eric Greenspan
Jeffrey Light
Craig S. Marshall
Francois Mobasser
Aaron Rosenberg
EQUITY PARTNERS, MYMAN GREENSPAN FOX ROSENBERG MOBASSER YOUNGER & LIGHT
Audrey Benoualid
PARTNER, MYMAN GREENSPAN FOX ROSENBERG MOBASSER YOUNGER & LIGHT

Granderson Des Rochers advised HYBE on its acquisition of Quality Control, home to Lil Yachty, Migos, Lil Baby and City Girls.

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

The firm's many clients include Red Hot Chili Peppers, Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber, Deftones, Grateful Dead, Jack Johnson and Yeti Beats, and its attorneys recently closed catalog sales for Bieber and Red Hot Chili Peppers. In January, Hipgnosis Songs Capital confirmed its deal to buy 100% of Bieber's publishing, as well as his artist royalties from his master recordings and neighboring rights, for more than $200 million, according to a source familiar with the situation, making it the largest rights sale for any creator of Bieber's generation. It's also Hipgnosis' biggest acquisition to date, covering all 290 titles in Bieber's catalog released prior to Dec. 31, 2021, including his most recent album, 2021's *Justice*. In looking at the broader legal landscape, Myman Greenspan's Marshall is among those who express concern about the rise of generative AI. "Because the music industry was built substantially on the creative contribution from recording artists and songwriters, the concern is that AI-generated songs could take up space in the competitive market for music consumption and replace career artists," he says. "This also gives rise to a number of copyright issues that will have to be resolved."

Gary R. Greenstein
MEMBER, WILSON SONSINI GOODRICH & ROSATI
Greenstein, who is based in Washington, D.C., and specializes in technology transactions, represented Google before the Copyright Royalty Board in the Phonorecords IV rate-setting proceeding. The case ended in a negotiated settlement of rates to be paid by interactive streaming services for the use of music beginning in January. In his view, everyone should profit fairly: "The economics of the music industry need to change so that distributors can have a path to profitability, which will benefit all participants and not just a select few."

RUSS AUGUST & KABAT

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MARCUS WIGGINS, FOUNDER

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info@wigginsmse.com

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Dina LaPolt

Sarah Scott

LAPOLTLAW P.C.

Pierre Hachar Jr.
MANAGING PARTNER, THE HACHAR LAW GROUP

Cody Pellicer
GENERAL PARTNER, THE HACHAR LAW GROUP

The South Florida law firm represents Carin León, Justin Quiles and Dalex Chayanne, as well as Celia Cruz's estate and the label Mr. 305, founded by Pitbull. Since last year's ongoing, high-profile public litigation of Frabian Eli Carrion v. Anuel AA, the lawyers have aided the Latin trap star in the "wrongful termination of [his] management contract." One of the most pressing concerns in the music industry, according to Hachar, is "dealing with a saturated market where the formats for consuming music are constantly evolving and changing." He urges that the power structure in the business would shift toward artists if "they kept control of their copyrights and learned how to effectively administer, market and monetize them."

Jonas Herbsman
MANAGING PARTNER, HERBSMAN HAFER WEBER & FRISCH

Michael Frisch
Dorothy Weber
PARTNERS, HERBSMAN HAFER WEBER & FRISCH

After working on several catalog sales — including Regent Music and Jewel Music to Primary Wave — the firm oversaw the sale of jazz legend Sonny Rollins' music rights to Reservoir in a deal that includes publishing and recording rights to the jazz legend's music. "It was an honor to represent one of the most decorated artists of all time," Herbsman says of Rollins, who will turn 93 in September. Rollins received the lifetime achievement award at the 2004 Grammys and was feted by the Kennedy Center Honors in 2011.

Lawrence Iser
Jonathan Steinsapir
PARTNERS, KINSELLA WEITZMAN ISER KUMP HOLLEY

An advocate for clients including Jackson Browne, Del Records and Third Side Music, Iser and his firm have for years pushed to give artists more control over their assets, from merchandise to streaming data. He represents music-funding service beatBread, which pays advances based on streaming royalties — leaving other revenue services untouched. "It is next to impossible for non-stars to make a living off streaming revenue," says Iser. "While there are lots of avenues for new artists to distribute their music online, only the top artists will make substantial money."

Erin M. Jacobson
ATTORNEY/CEO, ERIN M. JACOBSON

Jacobson handled cases related to acquisitions, publishing, licensing, complex catalog terminations and the counseling of estate and legacy catalogs, with recent proceedings involving Elvis Presley, The Ronettes, iconic TV theme songs and holiday classics, among many others. But while her work focused on historic music, Jacobson identifies the industry's most pressing issue as one that's extremely of the moment: AI. "This is an emerging area that will present a lot of practical and legal challenges as new avenues of technology," she says.

Neville L. Johnson
FOUNDING PARTNER, JOHNSON & JOHNSON

Johnson & Johnson's roster includes Janet Jackson, guitarist Andy McKee and rising musical group Between Friends. But founding partner Johnson highlights the firm's work on behalf of musicians without star billing. Settling "a major class action" suit against the American Federation of Musicians and the Hollywood actors' guild, SAG-AFTRA, "returned millions of dollars to a nonprofit fund benefitting thousands of session musicians and vocalists," he says. For 2023, he believes "transparency in accounting" remains a pressing concern. Streaming, he notes, has "failed to adequately democratize its earnings, and artists are still being routinely cheated by industry middlemen."

Russell A. Jones Jr.
ATTORNEY, LAW OFFICES OF RUSSELL A. JONES JR. AND ASSOCIATES

Jones, whose notable clients include Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Tim McGraw and Toby Keith, was key in negotiating agreements for Brooks' multiyear stadium tour that wrapped in August 2022. Jones notes that among the biggest challenges facing the music industry are "collection and equitable distribution of various royalty streams from [digital service providers], social media, all other digital exploiters and over-the-air radio."

Joshua A. Kamen
FOUNDER/OWNER, THE LAW OFFICES OF JOSHUA A. KAMEN

Kamen negotiated new publishing deals for clients Nija Charles (a Grammy nominee for songwriter of the year and winner of the Hitmaker trophy from the National Music Publishers' Association and *Billboard*), and OZ, who charted eight songs in the top 20 of the Hot 100 in the past 18 months. He also negotiated various brand, tour sponsorship and merchandise deals for clients Giveon, City Girls, Teddy Swims, 6LACK and IDK. "I think we need to figure out how to get kids to meaningfully connect with new artists again and not just listen to music as the soundtrack to viral videos," Kamen says, adding that "building the right team around each artist" is also crucial.

Jason Karlov
CHAIR, ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND SPORTS PRACTICE GROUP, BARNES & THORNBURG

Joel Katz
SENIOR COUNSEL, BARNES & THORNBURG

The clients of Barnes & Thornburg include Bob Dylan, John Fogerty, the Country Music Association and The Recording Academy, and senior executives such as Steve Carless, Monte Lipman, Randy Goodman, Mike Dungan, John Esposito and Scott Borchetta. The firm represented the NFL for Super Bowl LVI in 2022 and Super Bowl LVII earlier this year, including all production and guild matters, procurement of music rights, negotiating licenses and commercial agreements for live performances. Barnes & Thornburg also have been establishing the structure for the Grammy organization worldwide.

The attorneys of Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch oversaw the sale of the publishing and recording rights of legendary saxophonist Sonny Rollins.

CHUCK FISHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Fox Rothschild congratulates our partners who have made this illustrious list, and is proud to share this recognition with the rest of Billboard's 2023 Top Music Lawyers honorees.

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Russell L. King

www.kinglawfirm.net

Priyanka Khimani

FOUNDER, KHIMANI & ASSOCIATES

Khimani's clients include some of the most prominent names in India's music industry. Bollywood royalty such as Shankar Mahadevan, Arijit Singh and the estate of playback singing legend Lata Mangeshkar, plus hip-hop stars Badshah, Divine and King are just a few who rely on her. In recent months, she has helped Divine license a sample of the title cut from the soundtrack of the 1993 film *Baazigar*, advised Canadian Indian rapper-singer AP Dhillon for his recent appearance at the inaugural edition of Lollapalooza India in Mumbai and guided the Berklee Indian Ensemble on clearances for its Grammy-nominated collaborative album, *Shuruaat*, which features nearly 100 musicians. Says Khimani, "Each of these has been unique in structure and involves a foreign counterpart."

Russell L. King

DIRECTOR, KING LAW FIRM

Maluma had a standout year in 2022, as King negotiated the launch of his client's mezcal, Contraluz; his smash burger chain, Dembow; an endorsement deal with Hugo Boss; participation in and recording of the official song for the World Cup; and participation in the 2022 Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix and related South Florida concerts. King says that live music "is back and stronger than ever after the pandemic. But the battle scars are very evident, with the parties requiring additional protection of their interests" with "risk minimization such as insurance."

Christiane Kinney

PRESIDENT/ATTORNEY, KINNEY LAW

In the past year, Kinney was involved in a project with Blind Burners, a group of visually impaired artists and performers. Through her client Big Rock Creative, a virtual world was created in the metaverse, designed for Blind Burners and other similarly impaired virtual reality users. Next, Kinney is looking to protect her artists against the "fascinating but dangerous" rise of AI-generated artwork. "There will be a surge of copyright infringement claims filed in the not-so-distant future," she says, "in which many legal theories and issues will be tested."

PUNIT PARANJPE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Mark Krais
Simon Goodbody

PARTNERS, BRAY & KRAIS

Krais and Goodbody represented Ed Sheeran in last year's U.K. High Court copyright infringement trial over the singer's 2017 global hit "Shape of You." Sheeran and co-writers Johnny McDaid and Steven McCutcheon won after a judge ruled that the star hadn't copied the song from a little-known track by British artist Sami Switch. The victory "laid down a marker for those parties who may seek to use litigation as a tool to pressurize songwriters and publishers into making settlement payments, irrespective of the merits of the underlying dispute," the firm said in a statement. London-based Bray & Krais' other clients include The Rolling Stones, Universal Music Publishing, Sony Music Publishing and rapper KSI.

Priyanka Khimani advised Canadian Indian rapper-singer AP Dhillon for his recent appearance at the inaugural edition of Lollapalooza India in Mumbai.

Evan Krauss
Daniel Shulman
Owen Sloane
Andrew Tavel

PARTNERS, EISNER

Jordan Gutglass

SENIOR COUNSEL, EISNER

In addition to its work on behalf of clients Jon Batiste, G-Eazy, Boi-1da, PartyNextDoor, Matchbox Twenty/Rob Thomas, Sofi Tukker, the Aaliyah estate and others, Eisner recently represented boutique merchandiser Ceremony of Roses in its deal with Sony Music, announced in 2022, where the major label made a strategic investment in the company. The deal also included the launch of the brand as a new global merchandising, media, design and events company under the Sony umbrella. The firm continues to assist with and consult on the negotiation of Ceremony of Roses' artist merchandising agreements at all levels.

Dina LaPolt

FOUNDER/OWNER, LAPOLT LAW

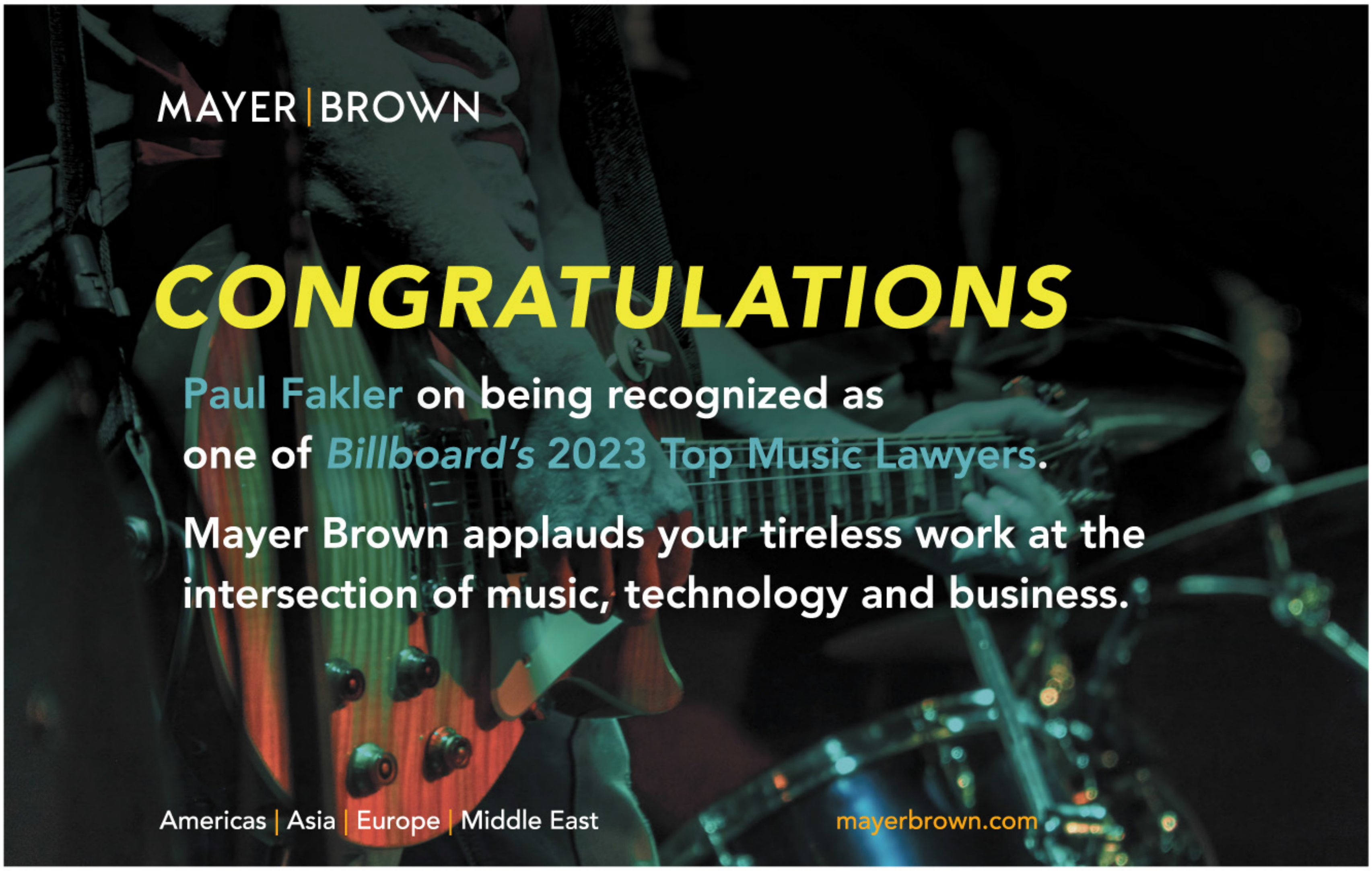
Sarah Scott

MANAGING PARTNER, LAPOLT LAW

The current McDonald's campaign featuring Cardi B and Offset, and the release of new songs from The Kid LAROI through an immersive experience in Epic Games' *Fortnite* are just two of the recent blockbuster deals negotiated by LaPolt and Scott, who also count 21 Savage, deadmau5 and Steven Tyler as clients.

The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if ...

> "... true partnerships were formed between artists and labels — or other investors in music — to develop careers. As more and more artists learn that they can have a significant role in marketing and promoting their works independently, artist leverage could rise exponentially if they practice patience and rely on themselves more often, rather than jumping into a relationship with a partner who is chasing a song rather than a career."
>
> – CRAIG MARSHALL, MYMAN GREENSPAN FOX ROSENBERG MOBASSER YOUNGER & LIGHT



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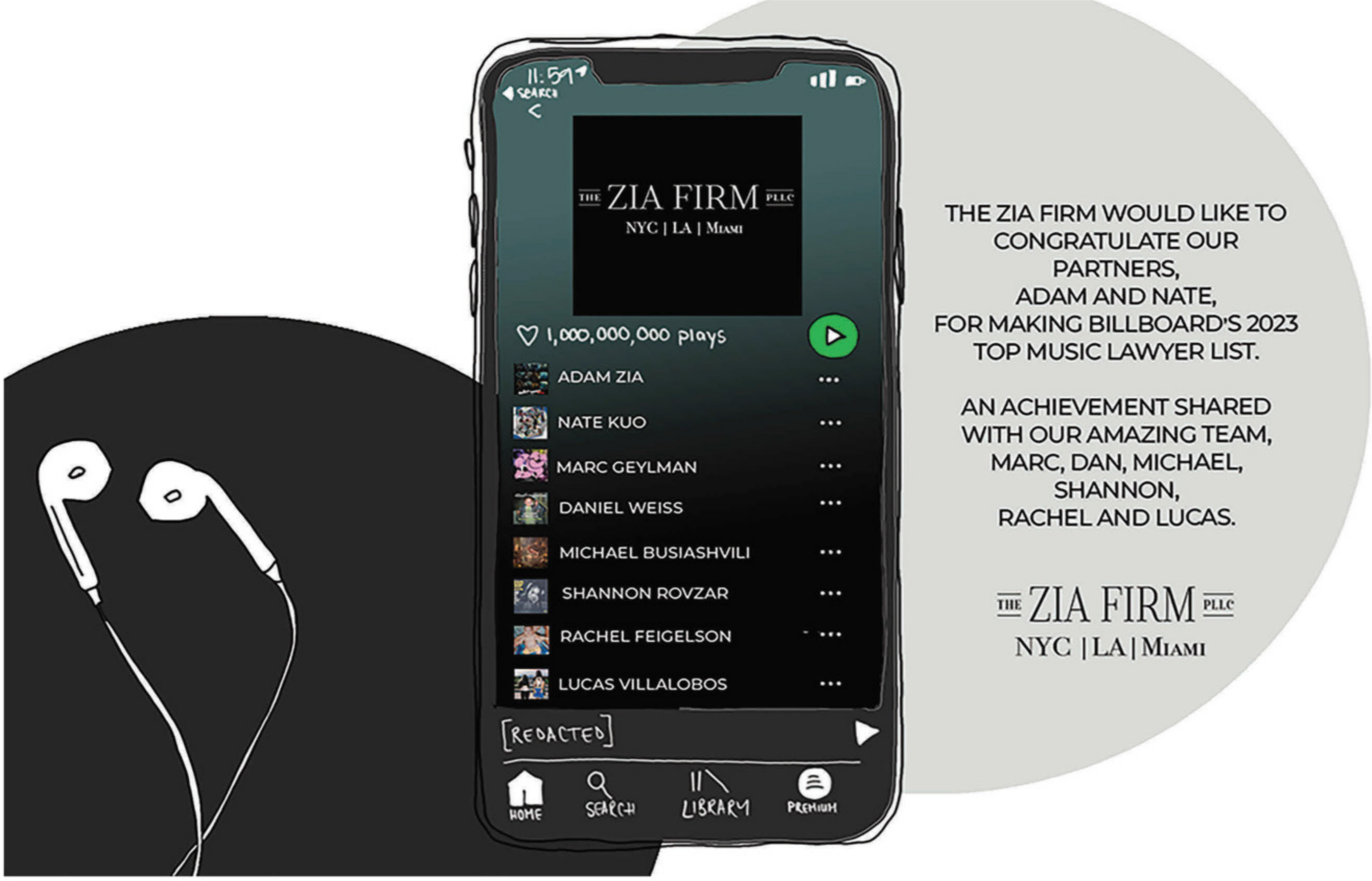

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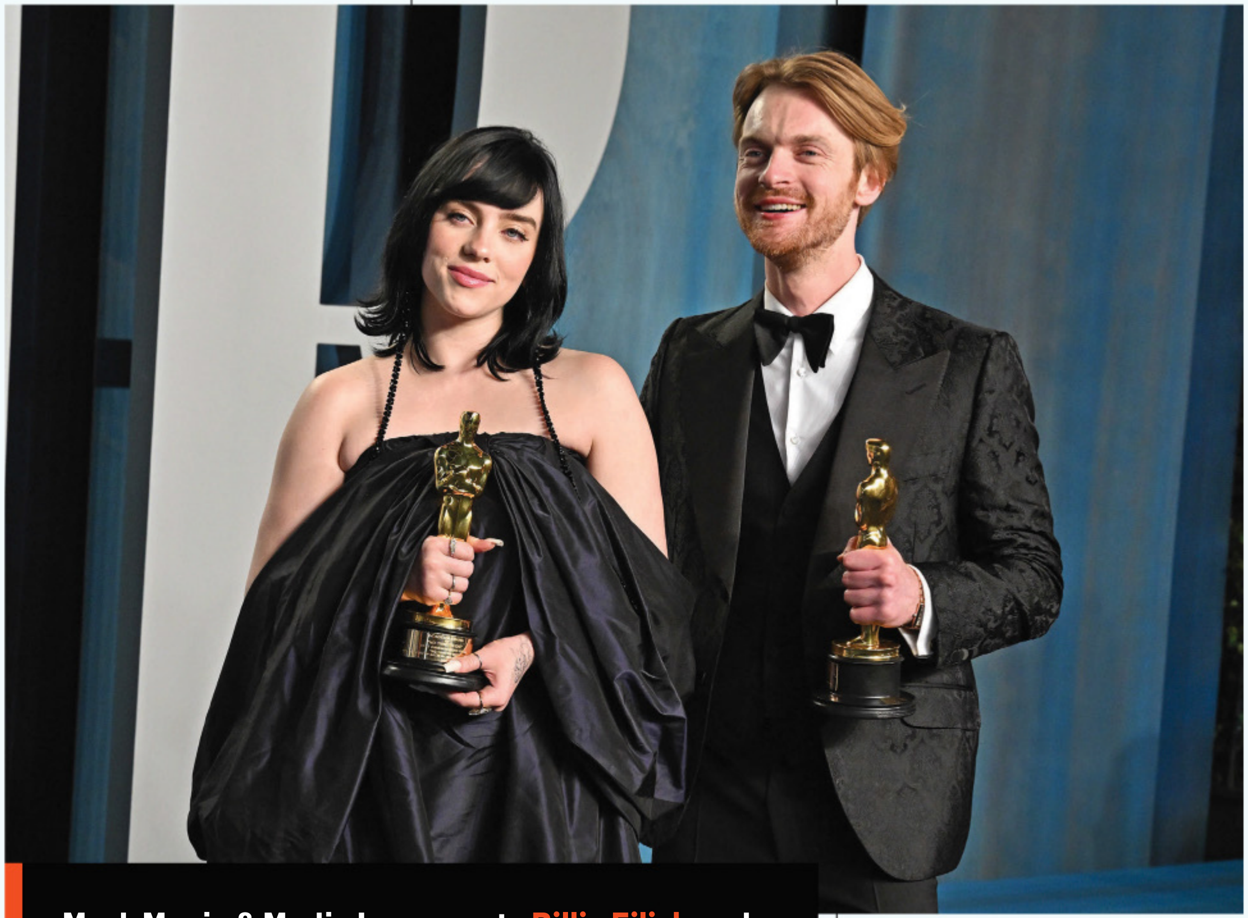
LaPolt also has been urging members of Congress to support the Restoring Artistic Protection (RAP) Act, which would sharply limit when any form of creative or artistic expression — including hip-hop lyrics — could be used as evidence against the creator of the works.

Todd Larson
Benjamin Marks
PARTNERS, WEIL GOTSHAL & MANGES
Representing clients such as SiriusXM, Spotify, Twitter and AEG Presents, Marks and Larson have a front-row view of the industry's royalty battles. Citing his biggest case of 2022, Larson says his representation of AEG and the North American Concert Promoters Association against BMI in the BMI rate court in the Southern District of New York "will set the royalty rates paid by members of the [promoters association] for the public performance of songs in the BMI repertoire for the period from 2014-2022."

Bernie Lawrence-Watkins
FOUNDER, B. LAWRENCE WATKINS & ASSOCIATES
It has been a banner year for Lawrence-Watkins' "Big Energy" client Latto. Her hit single peaked at No. 3 on the Hot 100, while parent set *777* reached No. 15 on the Billboard 200. In addition to negotiating clearances for *777* and Latto's appearances on Lizzo's The Special Tour, Lawrence-Watkins says she "negotiated various endorsement and live-performance deals with the likes of Steve Madden, Savage Fenty, Apple, *Essence*, WNBA, Wingstop, Sprite, Spotify and more." A best new artist Grammy nominee and *Billboard*'s 2023 Women in Music Powerhouse honoree, Latto is part of a client roster at Lawrence-Watkins' firm that includes rising artists such as Baby Tate, Young Nudy and Doe Boy.

Shay Lawson
FOUNDER/MANAGING ATTORNEY, LAW FIRM OF LAWSON McKINLEY
Lawson has served as a voice and advocate for the passing of the Decriminalizing Artistic Expression Act in California and for the RAP Act at the federal level to prevent the use of rap lyrics and creative expression as evidence of a crime. She says, "The fight for state and federal legislation is so important as artists continue to face unfair criminal scrutiny, arrests and charges solely based on lyrics and creative expressions."

William R. Leibowitz
FOUNDER, WILLIAM R. LEIBOWITZ LAW GROUP
Leibowitz has been in the thick of the music-asset acquisition boom for the last 18 months, representing both the publicly traded Hipgnosis Songs Fund and Hipgnosis Songs Capital — the private investment partnership vehicle between Hipgnosis Songs Management and Blackstone, handling the closing of rights acquisitions from Justin Bieber, Justin Timberlake, the estate of Leonard Cohen, Nile Rodgers, Kenny Chesney and Nelly Furtado. Besides representing the various incarnations of Hipgnosis, his other clients include INXS, Iron Maiden and Global Merchandising services.



Mark Music & Media Law counts Billie Eilish and her brother, FINNEAS; Ice Spice; Danny Elfman; and Guns N' Roses among its clients.

Kent Marcus
OWNER/SENIOR PARTNER, MARCUS & COLVIN
In addition to advising an eclectic list of recording artists, Marcus' clients include publishers and Web3 companies, giving him valuable perspective on what he calls "the possibilities versus the dangers of technology. Technology always moves faster than the industry." Guiding Kings of Leon, Jason Aldean, Dierks Bentley, Molly Tuttle, Lainey Wilson, Joy Oladokun, Marcus King, Margo Price and Black Pumas, the firm looks to "give them the best protection and opportunity for success." Recently, that involved brokering and closing a nine-figure deal for Aldean's masters to Spirit Music Group.

Doug Mark
FOUNDING PARTNER, MARK MUSIC & MEDIA LAW
David Ferreria
Harry Roberts
PARTNERS, MARK MUSIC & MEDIA LAW
Jaimie Roberts
OF COUNSEL, MARK MUSIC & MEDIA LAW
Billie Eilish, FINNEAS, Ice Spice, Danny Elfman, Guns N' Roses and other top talent are part of the firm's diverse roster after Los Angeles-based Mark Music & Media Law merged with New York's Roberts & Hafitz at the end of 2022. Clients also include Warner Films' Water Tower Music, for which the firm negotiated music deals in Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis* and Warner Bros. Pictures' forthcoming live-action *Barbie* directed by Greta Gerwig. Among Ferreria's top industry concerns: "Modernizing recording agreements and other contracts to keep up with the fast-paced and content-intensive nature of the industry."

James E. McMillan
MANAGING PARTNER, JAMES E. McMILLAN; CEO, ART@WAR
When McMillan's firm was engaged to represent a popular young drill group, his team faced the challenge of working with a group member who was a minor, "protecting his rights and interest for the long term on one hand, while attempting to seize his current opportunity in a fast-paced marketplace on the other," he says, calling that environment "a challenging terrain to navigate. It's easy for a minor to get caught up in the hype of flash cash, fancy clothes and social media fame. As stewards of his rights, our job is to do our best to protect his interests so that when the spotlight fades, he still has something to show for it." McMillan is among those fighting against the use of rap lyrics in criminal prosecutions. "California has passed legislation to address this issue," he notes. "The other states need to catch up."

L. Londell McMillan
CHAIRMAN/CEO, THE McMILLAN FIRM AND NORTHSTAR BUSINESS ENTERPRISES
McMillan is a co-owner of the business entity Prince Legacy — formerly the Prince estate — and his firm represents the catalog of late Mobb Deep member Prodigy, established acts Mount Westmore (the hip-hop supergroup of Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, Too $hort and E-40) and Doug E. Fresh, plus the NorthStar Music Group and McMillan-owned hip-hop magazine *The Source*. The firm has also secured co-publishing deals with Stargate and Pulse Music for emerging artists Kyla

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Imani and Lucas Santos. The latter is in keeping with McMillan’s chief concern in the coming year: “Protection of artists’ and songwriters’ revenue streams and healthcare.”

Ed McPherson

FOUNDING PARTNER/TRIAL LAWYER, McPHERSON

With a client roster including Travis Scott, Frank Ocean, Justin Timberlake and Kelly Clarkson, McPherson considers “frivolous lawsuits” to be the industry’s most pressing challenge, particularly “copyright lawsuits that stifle the creativity of songwriters and concert-related suits that will ultimately cause ticket prices to increase so significantly that only a select few fans will be able to afford them.”

Robert Meitus

MANAGING PARTNER, MEITUS GELBERT ROSE

Working with artists such as Sufjan Stevens, Keb’ Mo’ and Nathan Johnson (composer for *Glass Onion* and *Knives Out*), Meitus says a pressing concern for the music business remains “gender and racial equity throughout the industry,” including record production, airplay, the Grammys and high-level employment opportunities in record labels, publishers, artist management and other companies. Meitus is also the co-founder of and legal counsel for Mandolin Software, which *Fast Company* recognized as a leading innovative music tech company for its products such as Fan Navigator, a comprehensive fan data platform.

Matthew Middleton

FOUNDER/PRINCIPAL, MIDDLETON LAW

Middleton helps his clients “navigate and take advantage of effective independent distribution models,” he says. Whether they’re forging new mainstream partnerships, such as rapper Sha EK signing with Warner Records last summer, or reasserting their indie cred (as Alabama hip-hop superstar Bleu did when he abruptly exited his management deal with a tweet just months before his newest release), Middleton’s clients have an attorney who is committed to “vigorously advocating for artists and songwriters to be compensated fairly,” he says. With Blackground Records, another client, Middleton also finds new generations of fans, as he did last April, when he set up a first vinyl pressing for the late Aaliyah’s self-titled 2001 release.

Carron Joan Mitchell of Nixon Peabody handled all legal transactions on behalf of Brent Faiyaz, whose album *Wasteland* debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200.

Michael Milom
David Crow

PARTNERS, MILOM CROW KELLEY BECKETT SHEHAN

The firm, which represents clients including Keith Urban, Luke Bryan, Carly Pearce, Scotty McCreery, Kelsea Ballerini and Mickey Guyton, closed 13 catalog transactions during the past year, totaling over $139 million. Milom and Crow note that artist development remains an ongoing concern within the music industry, saying that there needs to be a balance between the pursuit of immediate social media metrics and long-term careers.

Carron Joan Mitchell

PARTNER, NIXON PEABODY

Farrah J. Usmani

COUNSEL, NIXON PEABODY

Among her many other clients, Mitchell handled all legal transactions on behalf of Brent Faiyaz, whose album *Wasteland* debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200. Honored as an ASCAP Woman Behind the Music in 2022, Mitchell sees transparency in the industry as an issue. “Luckily, many companies are taking notice and are creating platforms to enable more transparency with everything, from the deal structures to budget spends and accountings,” she says. Usmani’s diverse client roster includes genre-defying band Rainbow Kitten Surprise, booking agents and concert promoter Outback Presents. Usmani represented Outback Presents in its deals to secure the rights to produce and promote the 2023 tours of Rauw Alejandro and Romeo Santos. The next frontier is AI-generated music, she says, noting, “Those of us representing human artists and songwriters will have to stay ahead of the curve to ensure our clients have the opportunity to evolve in tandem with technology.”

Zia Modabber

MANAGING PARTNER OF THE LOS ANGELES OFFICES/CHAIR OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND LITIGATION PRACTICE, KATTEN MUCHIN ROSENMAN

Lil Nas X, Stevie Wonder, Usher, Nine Inch Nails and the estate of Michael Jackson are just a few of the firm’s clients. “I’m fortunate to represent so many exceptionally gifted performers, including one of my longest clients, Trent Reznor,” he says. “Since we started together over 20 years ago, my role has evolved to where I now function as a sort of outside general counsel. He is an absurdly talented recording artist, songwriter and performer.” While compensating musicians fairly remains a pressing industry issue, Modabber says, “Look out for AI because it’s about to force a host of new challenges.”

Lisa F. Moore

PRINCIPAL, MOORE PEQUIGNOT

Andrew Pequignot

MEMBER, MOORE PEQUIGNOT

Gary P. Adelman

MANAGING PARTNER, ADELMAN MATZ

Sarah M. Matz

PARTNER, ADELMAN MATZ

Moore Pequignot’s attorneys represented Cardi B in a closely watched trial over accusations that the superstar rapper violated a California man’s rights by photoshopping one of his tattoos onto a mixtape cover. After just an hour of deliberation, the jury sided with Cardi, clearing her of millions in possible damages. That was the second victory Moore Pequignot secured for Cardi in 2022, following a $4 million defamation verdict against a gossip blogger who published lies about the rapper. On that case, the firm teamed with Adelman Matz’s attorneys; that firm has also represented Migos, Khalid, DaBaby and A$AP Rocky, as well as companies such as Beatport, HYBE and Justin Bieber’s Drew House.

TODD OWYOUNG/NBC/GETTY IMAGES

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Matt Oppenheim
MANAGING PARTNER, OPPENHEIM + ZEBRAK
Scott Zebrak
CO-FOUNDING PARTNER, OPPENHEIM + ZEBRAK
Jeff Gould
Alex Kaplan
PARTNERS, OPPENHEIM + ZEBRAK

While representing the three major music groups, the firm has continued to combat “copyright infringement and piracy from stifling the lawful ecosystem for enjoying music,” Zebrak says, noting recent settlements in infringement cases against Charter Communications and Bright House, which involved more than 23,000 copyrighted works. Oppenheim + Zebrak has also brought copyright infringement suits against the music video app Vinkle and the video-sharing app Triller. It alleges that Vinkle “is built on a library of copyrighted musical works that Vinkle neither owns nor has obtained a license to use,” says Zebrak, and charges Triller with “willful and unauthorized use of copyrighted sound recordings in Triller’s commercial social media service” and “failure and refusal to pay millions of dollars in contractual licensing fees.” Those companies contest the claims.

Don Passman
Ethan Schiffres
PARTNERS, GANG TYRE RAMER BROWN & PASSMAN
Gene Salomon
MANAGING PARTNER, GANG TYRE RAMER BROWN & PASSMAN

As the live market came roaring back after the pandemic shutdown, the firm was busy getting artists back in front of audiences, including Adele’s sold-out Las Vegas residency, P!nk’s upcoming tour, Taylor Swift’s massive outing and even helping conductor Gustavo Dudamel shift from the Los Angeles Philharmonic to the New York Philharmonic. But for Salomon, the highlight was opening night for *A Beautiful Noise*, the Broadway jukebox musical based on longtime client Neil Diamond’s life. “That Neil was able to get up and sing with the cast at the end,” he says, “was a special moment.”

Michael Perlstein
Robert H. Lieberman
PARTNERS, FISCHBACH PERLSTEIN LIEBERMAN & ALMOND

The firm has been involved in numerous purchases and sales transactions involving master recordings and song compositions for various creators during the last 18 months, as well as numerous agreements involving complex copyright issues. While they decline to specify the parties in those agreements, Perlstein lists as clients Bob Dylan, Peggy Lee Associates, Edward Holland, the estate of Mac “Dr. John” Rebennack, Paul Simon and Sylvia Tyson; Lieberman cites clients including GoDigital and its Cinq Music Group subsidiary, E40, Strange Music and Run It Up Records.

Adrian Perry
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP, COVINGTON & BURLING
Neema Sahni
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP/VICE CHAIR OF SPORTS INDUSTRY GROUP, COVINGTON & BURLING
Jonathan Sperling
PARTNER/CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP, COVINGTON & BURLING

Covington & Burling represents many of music’s most powerful companies, including the three major music groups. Last year, the firm helped bring Universal Music Group into the Web3 era by representing it in partnership agreements with NFT marketplaces Curio, Snowcrash and *Billboard* (through Unblocked), while also advising the company on the formation of the NFT-backed band Kingship. Moving forward, Perry says the firm is concerned with “how economic headwinds and an associated decline in ad-based streaming revenue may impact revenue and licensing structures.”

Chip Petree
PARTNER, RITHOLZ LEVY FIELDS

With clients ranging from country heavyweights Chris Stapleton and Brothers Osborne to roots-music masters Tyler Childers and Billy Strings, Petree’s firm has worked to “enhance fan engagement in nontraditional ways” with unique brand partnerships, appearance agreements and live-music streaming deals, he says. “One example is Chris Stapleton’s relationship with RAM Trucks,” says Petree, who opened his firm’s Nashville office in 2014. “Within the last two years, Stapleton’s recording of the Al Green classic ‘I’m a Ram’ has been used in a RAM advertising campaign and a Super Bowl pregame spot that ran before Stapleton’s widely praised rendition of the national anthem.”

Daniel Petrocelli
TRIAL PRACTICE CHAIR/FIRM VICE CHAIR, O’MELVENY & MYERS
David Marroso
GENERAL LITIGATION PRACTICE HEAD, O’MELVENY & MYERS
Leah Godesky
Terrance Dugan
PARTNERS, O’MELVENY & MYERS

One of the firm’s clients, Global Music Rights, recently settled a yearslong legal dispute against the Radio Music Licensing Committee. The settlement followed the performing rights organization’s 2016 antitrust lawsuit over music licensing fees that RMLC’s 10,000 radio station members pay GMR’s 100-plus songwriters, which include Drake, Pharrell Williams, Lizzo and Nicki Minaj. O’Melveny & Myers settled copyright infringement lawsuits against two terrestrial radio companies, Red Wolf Broadcasting and One Putt Broadcasting, earlier this year. Marroso says ticketing practices will be the music industry’s most pressing concern in 2023. “Government investigations and private litigation surrounding ticketing practices are expected to raise important questions about competition, market power and related issues,” he says.

Lee Phillips
SENIOR PARTNER, MANATT PHELPS & PHILLIPS
Jordan Bromley
PARTNER/ENTERTAINMENT GROUP LEADER, MANATT PHELPS & PHILLIPS
W. Joseph Anderson
Eric Custer
Gary Gilbert
Robert Jacobs
Beau Stapleton
Monika Tashman
PARTNERS, MANATT PHELPS & PHILLIPS

Manatt Phelps & Phillips handled two of the music industry’s top deals of 2022: Dundee Partners’ $1.1 billion acquisition of Kobalt Capital Limited’s music rights portfolio, KMR Music Royalties II, and Francisco Partners Management’s move to obtain a majority stake in Kobalt Investment. Manatt’s partners represent music clients including Pepe Aguilar, Paul Anka, Jackson Browne, Tracy Chapman, Death Cab for Cutie, Diplo, Dirty Projectors, The Drums, the Eagles, Major Lazer, ODESZA, Steve Perry, Thievery Corporation, Jack White, Brian Wilson, Neil Young and the estates of Burt Bacharach, John Lee Hooker, Rick James and Pop Smoke.

Vince Phillips
CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER, ARRINGTON & PHILLIPS
Aurielle Brooks
SENIOR ASSOCIATE, ARRINGTON & PHILLIPS; GENERAL COUNSEL, COLLECTIVE GALLERY

Representing YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Lil Baby (for his label, Wolf Pack Global), Bow Wow, Keri Hilson and other top clients, Phillips and Brooks have cleared a number of platinum- and gold-certified albums and singles, and negotiated TV deals and two national arena tours. Under their representation, YoungBoy Never Broke Again’s label secured a joint venture with Motown Records. The firm also brokered a catalog sale for the chart-topping rapper. According to Brooks, a major issue facing the music industry today is a lack of authenticity, coupled with demand for instant gratification. “Truly authentic talent and artistry

Chip Petree of Ritholz Levy Fields has focused on brand partnerships for his clients, including a deal between Chris Stapleton and RAM Trucks.

GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES

LARRY ISER

JONATHAN STEINSAPIR

We applaud

Larry Iser & Jonathan Steinsapir

on their selection to *Billboard*'s 2023 list of **"Top Music Lawyers."**

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KINSELLA WEITZMAN ISER KUMP HOLLEY
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We are honored to be among this year's honorees.

We thank our clients for the inspiration that made it possible.

seem to be harder to discern now more than ever," Brooks says. "The rise of TikTok and various outlets that allow a singular quick buzz to blossom is great for artists who have sat undiscovered for some time, [but] it is a cloudy indicator of what is true of this artist."

Tabetha Plummer

FOUNDER, PLUMMER LAW GROUP

Plummer has been making money moves for a client roster that includes R&B singers Jhené Aiko and Ledisi, and Grammy-nominated producers Rex Rideout and Mike City. Her firm has helped hip-hop legend Snoop Dogg expand his portfolio to include a Skechers sneaker line and a Death Row cannabis brand. But even with those wins, she's increasingly concerned about "how streaming services pay writers, producers and artists," she says, as well as the emergence of AI technology in recorded music: "It creates a litany of other legal issues, beginning with who owns the copyright, name and image rights."

Michael Poster

CHAIR OF MUSIC ACQUISITIONS AND FINANCING/PARTNER, MICHELMAN & ROBINSON

In one of the most significant hip-hop deals of the year, Poster and his team spearheaded a majority stake acquisition in the publishing catalog of the late Chicago rapper Juice WRLD. The multimillion-dollar transaction also gave Opus Music Group majority ownership of the rapper's master-rights income from releases including five top five-charting albums on the Billboard 200. The deal was "a great example of how we're able to bridge the gap between private equity and corporate work," he says, "and rights issues, personalities and the complexities of the music industry."

Edwin Prado

FOUNDER/CEO, PRADO LAW OFFICES

Prado's name is synonymous with reggaetón and urban music, with a lengthy client list that includes Daddy Yankee, Don Omar and Anuel AA, as well as labels Pina Records, El Cartel and Glad Empire, and superstar clients Ricardo Arjona and Romeo Santos. The veteran attorney — who practices law in Puerto Rico, Florida and New York — had a particularly busy year, representing Daddy Yankee and Pina Records in breach of contract and copyright infringement cases, respectively, and handling the aftermath of the plane accident that killed producer Flow La Movie and his family. Prado also negotiated Nio García's complex exit from record label Flow La Movie and joined Pina Records founder Raphy Pina's defense team in post-appeal procedures related to his 2021 conviction on a federal gun charge.

Michael Poster and his team at Michelman & Robinson guided Opus Music Group's acquisition of a majority stake in the late Juice WRLD's publishing catalog.

TAYLOR HILL/GETTY IMAGES

Gregor Pryor
Stephen Sessa

PARTNERS/CO-CHAIRS, GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP, REED SMITH

Joshua Love
Eric Marder
Edward Shapiro

PARTNERS, GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP, REED SMITH

In addition to representing some of the most established global digital music companies, Pryor works extensively in music and Web3, advising pioneers such as Animoca, Unity, deadmau5's Pixelynx, Stationhead, Gala Music, BandLab, Audius, TSX Entertainment, Opulous and Frever. Sessa serves as Concord's outside counsel and has led all of the company's major publishing acquisitions, including the works of Phil Collins and Genesis, as well as Downtown Music, Imagem, Pulse, B Unique, Razor & Tie, Tams Witmark, Samuel French, Sikorski and many others. Love represented Seeker Music Group in all its major catalog acquisitions, including Christopher Cross, Troy Oliver and Run the Jewels, and Spirit Music Group when it acquired Jason Aldean's catalog of recordings. Shapiro serves as counsel to Rihanna in all her endeavors, most recently handling her Super Bowl Halftime Show performance and new venture with PUMA. Marder, the firm's newest partner, also represents Roc Nation as outside counsel for music matters.

William Ramsey

PARTNER, NEAL HARWELL

Ramsey, whose past and present clients include Garth Brooks, Kane Brown, Miranda Lambert and Red Light Management, represented a number of acts in major trademark and copyright disputes over the last year. But he says his most gratifying work has been representing the Otha Turner Collection, which has been acquired by the National Museum of African American Music. In June, Ramsey hosted his 28th annual Ode to Otha fundraiser, a tribute to the Black fife-and-drum blues musician, which raised money for Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee. "Opportunities like this allow me to advocate for my clients — and friends — outside the courtroom so that together we can keep the legacy and impact of traditional music alive," Ramsey says.

Rollin Ransom

PARTNER/CO-LEADER OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS AND MEDIA PRACTICE; GLOBAL COMMERCIAL LITIGATION AND DISPUTES PRACTICE; MANAGING PARTNER OF THE LOS ANGELES OFFICE, SIDLEY AUSTIN

Matthew Thompson

PARTNER/CO-LEADER OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS AND MEDIA PRACTICE, SIDLEY AUSTIN

Sidley Austin's client Universal Music Group had a major development in the closely watched litigation involving hundreds of artists who sued the label in a single lawsuit to regain control of their master recordings. Earlier this year, the firm obtained a denial of class certification with a federal judge in New York ruling that the case cannot proceed as a class action but rather each musician will have to file his or her own case. This latest ruling comes four years after "Missing You" singer John Waite filed a lawsuit — as lead plaintiff — over copyright law's termination right.

Berkeley Reinhold

FOUNDER/OWNER, REINHOLD GLOBAL

Reinhold, whose firm specializes in entertainment, touring and music, serves as general counsel for Lollapalooza and offered guidance on its global expansion into Asia. The festival held its first shows in Mumbai, India, in January, marking the fest's seventh international territory alongside South America, Europe and North America. Reinhold's other notable clients include Live Nation, Global Citizen and such acts as Marc Anthony, Thievery Corporation and Winston House. She believes that climate change is the most pressing concern facing the live-events industry.

Elliot Resnik

PARTNER/CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT, MASUR GRIFFITTS AVIDOR

Resnik's clients include Killer Mike and his hip-hop duo, Run the Jewels, as well as music agency All Things Go Music and the National Independent Venue Association. Some of Resnik's successes over the past year are supporting the release of *RTJ Cu4tro* — Run the Jewels' Spanish-language reimagination of its fourth album, in collaboration with several Latin artists — and the sale of Killer Mike's publishing to Reservoir Media, including his future works and back catalog. Looking ahead, Resnik keeps the fight for fair compensation to writers, publishers and performers top of mind, "ensuring we don't allow their rights to be undervalued in the coming transition to Web3 platforms."

Alexis Robinson
Daniel Schnapp

PARTNERS, SHEPPARD MULLIN

In the past 18 months, Sheppard Mullin, which represents Spotify, ASCAP, Peloton and Vevo, led Atlanta-based investment firm Domain Capital Group in acquiring multiple music catalogs including the works of Nashville hit-maker Ashley Gorley. The firm also guided Sony Pictures Television's purchase of Industrial Media, owner of the reality series *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, among others. Looking ahead, Schnapp says the rise of "emerging technologies and innovative platforms" like virtual reality, augmented reality and AI "will undoubtedly have a profound and potentially disruptive effect on the status quo."

GRAY LAW

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2023
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The RLG team would like to congratulate

ANGELA ROGERS

for being recognized as one of

BILLBOARD'S 2023
TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

ROGERS LAW GROUP

Oswaldo M. Rossi and his firm provided legal services to Karol G, who made history with *Mañana Será Bonito*, the first chart-topping Spanish-language album on the Billboard 200 by a female artist.

DENISE TRUSCELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Carlos Rodríguez-Féliz

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER, RODFEL LAW

Rodríguez-Féliz — whose clients include RaiNao, Lenny Tavárez, Villano Antillano, Subelo Neo and Young Miko — says the most pressing concern in the industry is "how fast music is being consumed by fans and how demanding of music the public is in short periods of time." Securing Antillano's global publishing deal with Warner Chappell, Sech producer Cerebro's deal with Kobalt and Tavárez's publishing deal with Sony Music Publishing are just a few of his recent negotiations.

Angela Rogers

OWNER, ROGERS LAW GROUP

Rogers' firm negotiated multimillion-dollar client deals with Nike, Sprite, Adidas, UGG, Forever 21 and Bose during the last 18 months. "Major companies have always had a presence in the Black music space," says Rogers, whose primarily R&B/hip-hop client roster includes Coi Leray, Nardo Wick, Tink, G Herbo, EST Gee, Jay Electronica and Marsha Ambrosius. "But in the past, artists would have to concede on either money or deliverables just for an opportunity to work with some of these brands. However, now we're seeing corporate companies coming to the table with more lucrative and innovative deals that value the artists' cultural impact."

Oswaldo M. Rossi

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER, ROSSI

John R. Baldivia

PARTNER, ROSSI

The firm provided legal services to Colombian superstar Karol G, who had a top-grossing tour, a history-making Billboard 200 No. 1 album with *Mañana Será Bonito* and new brand deals with Corona and Google Pixel. Rossi also assisted with Noah Assad's joint venture with Live Nation and the renewal of Bad Bunny producer MAG's publishing deal with Warner Chappell and his producer agreement for *Un Verano Sin Ti*. Baldivia says a pressing concern is "finding a way for the Latin music world as a whole to compete financially with the rest of the general market in all facets of the business."

Todd Rubenstein

FOUNDING PRINCIPAL, TODD RUBENSTEIN LAW

Rubenstein recently negotiated several high-profile signings, including ThxSoMuch's deal with Elektra, d4vd's deal with Interscope and Jeleel's deal with 10K Projects. "The process [of negotiating dv4d's and ThxSoMuch's deals] was a case study of the issues facing lawyers in 2022 to 2023," he explains. "From insufficient rights to tracks licensed from online services, to deal roadblocks caused by provisions buried in the online indie distributor websites, to artwork pulled from Google without necessary rights, it has become harder for young artists to close record deals because of third parties." Rubenstein's firm also represents Khalid, songwriting-production duo The Monsters and Strangerz, songwriter-producer Oak Felder and songwriter Theron Thomas, among others.

Steven H. Sadow

PRINCIPAL, STEVEN H. SADOW

Brian Steel

FOUNDER, THE STEEL LAW FIRM

When Young Thug and Gunna were indicted in May 2022 on accusations that they participated in a violent Atlanta street gang, they tapped veteran Georgia attorneys with extensive experience handling such cases. Steel, a well-known Atlanta criminal defense attorney who had previously represented 21 Savage, is serving as lead counsel for Young Thug in the ongoing trial, which started in January and is expected to run for months. Gunna hired Sadow, who also counts Rick Ross, T.I. and Usher as clients. Along with attorneys from the firm Garland Samuel & Loeb, Sadow helped Gunna negotiate a plea deal that allowed him to exit the case in December without cooperating with prosecutors.

Daniel Schacht

PARTNER/MUSIC AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ATTORNEY, DONAHUE FITZGERALD

In his eight years as a partner, Schacht has expanded Donahue Fitzgerald's clientele to include newer artists such as singer-songwriter mxmtoon, adding to its powerhouse roster of legacy artists including Santana, the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart and songwriting duo Cynthia Weil & Barry Mann. Among many other matters, Schact led the team representing Wixen Music Publishing in its suit against Triller, seeking over $50 million in damages for copyright infringement. The case, Schacht says, was "successfully resolved in September 2022."

Michael Selverne

MANAGING PARTNER, SELVERNE BRADFORD

Selverne doesn't disclose clients, but sources tell *Billboard* that he represents Round Hill Music, closing the company's music-asset acquisitions. In the past year, those have included a stake in the publishing catalog and a share in the master royalties of Alice in Chains and both the publishing catalog and master royalties from David Coverdale, among other deals. While terms of those deals were not disclosed, *Billboard* estimates the deal for Coverdale's music assets carried a $35 million valuation.

Robert J. Sherman

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR, ENTERTAINMENT FINANCE PRACTICE, DLA PIPER

Sherman was the lead attorney in Concord's historic $1.8 billion music securitization of over 1 million copyrights. The asset-based security offering is the largest in terms of both size of issuance and number of assets. Apollo Global Management and Redding Ridge Asset Management structured the transaction and formed an investor syndicate led by Apollo-managed funds. Sherman believes one of the most pressing concerns for the industry is to expand the streaming revenue base internationally. DLA Piper's client roster includes Gold State Music, Epitaph Records and Multimedia Music.

Jodie Shihadeh

FOUNDER/OWNER, SHIHADEH LAW

Shihadeh focuses on setting up clients (among them Dim Mak Records, Shenseea, Two Friends, EDEN and Matoma) for long-term success, negotiating deals that give them greater ownership of their creations and more favorable copyright reversion terms. She recently negotiated the immediate reversion of one notable songwriter client's entire 10-year publishing catalog, which her firm is now shopping. And she has a keen eye on tech and trends. "The industry is going to have a day of reckoning soon," Shihadeh says, "about its relationship with and reliance on TikTok."

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Larry Shire
NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE FILM AND TELEVISION DEPARTMENT, GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS
Kenny Meiselas
NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT, GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS
Joe Brenner
David Jacobs
PARTNERS, GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS

The legal powerhouse founded by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Allen Grubman has spent the past year-and-a-half on massive megastar deals: stadium tours for The Weeknd, Bruce Springsteen and Lady Gaga; Usher's Las Vegas residency; The Weeknd's upcoming HBO show, *The Idol*; Lizzo's Amazon show, *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*; and multimillion-dollar catalog sales for Springsteen, David Bowie and Sting. "In this post-COVID-19 return to live performance, we have negotiated the biggest tour deals of 2022 and 2023," says Meiselas, who adds that "diversity in high-level leadership positions" is the industry's most pressing concern.

Simran Singh
FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER, SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN
Michael A. Trauben
FOUNDER/PARTNER, SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN
Christopher Navarro
PARTNER, SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN

Singh and his partners helped several marquee clients make major deals in the last year, including Marco Antonio Solís, whose Amazon documentary, *El Buki: Las Letras de Mi Historia*, was released worldwide in December. The firm also oversaw the catalog acquisition, purchase and sale agreements for clients Ozuna and Duars Entertainment — and repped Daddy Yankee and his La Última Vuelta World Tour, which grossed $197.8 million.

Stanton "Larry" Stein
HEAD OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, RUSS AUGUST & KABAT
Irene Y. Lee
Ashley R. Yeargan
PARTNERS, RUSS AUGUST & KABAT

The firm defended Drake and 21 Savage in a trademark infringement lawsuit that Condé Nast filed for their spoof of a *Vogue* cover to promote their 2022 album, *Her Loss*. (The promotional blitz also featured parodies of *The Howard Stern Show*, *Saturday Night Live* and NPR's *Tiny Desk* concert series.) The firm continues to manage over 5,000 brands and attendant rights as part of its role in protecting the intellectual property portfolios of artists such as Cardi B, deadmau5, The Kid LAROI, Mick Fleetwood and Tyga, and labels including mau5trap, DirtyBird, 10K Projects and Imagendary Studios. "It's not a new concern," says Stein, "but there continues to be a situation where the majority of artists are not being sufficiently compensated for their work, particularly given the proliferation of streaming and the extremely low per-stream royalty that they are paid."

Rachel Stilwell
FOUNDER/CEO, STILWELL LAW

Stilwell Law has participated in multiple proceedings before the Federal Communications Commission on behalf of the musicFIRST Coalition and Future of Music Coalition on competition among audio delivery platforms. The firm also represents a mix of artists (LeAnn Rimes, Al B. Sure!, Noel Schajris), songwriters (Darrell Brown, Andre Merritt) and audio pros (Gavin Lurssen, Michael Romanowski, Paul Wolff, Tek O'Ryan). Stilwell cites the dominance of Ticketmaster and StubHub in the live-event ticketing space as the most pressing concern facing the music industry in 2023.

Michael Sukin
PRESIDENT, SUKIN COLTON LAW ASSOCIATION

Sukin, whose clients include the estates of Aretha Franklin, George Gershwin and Charles Aznavour, as well as St. Nicholas Music (the home of Christmas classics written by the late Johnny Marks), spent much of the last year reviewing the European Union Copyright Directive package as it applies to artists' rights. "The difficulty of protecting copyrights" remains a pressing concern, says Sukin, as well as "protecting pre-1972 recordings." The firm, with offices in New York, London and Nashville, also represents S2BN, the Michael Cohl-led live-entertainment promotion and production firm.

Ron Sweeney
CEO, DIGITAL DISRUPTION ENTERTAINMENT

Sweeney, who prefers not to name his clients, is known to have worked with James Brown, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Swizz Beats and Lil Wayne, among others. At the moment, he's most concerned with quantity over quality in the business, notably "the number of records released daily and how it affects the ability to market and promote new artists," he says. The 40-year industry veteran believes power dynamics would shift if more artists reached stardom through "independent labels not connected to the majors," he says. "It's coming."

ascap
ap
ascap

Adam Zia's firm helped singer-songwriter Starrah launch 3:02 Music Group, a publishing joint venture with Pulse Music Group that has since signed a number of rising artists.

CHELSEA LAUREN/VARIETY

Brandon E. Tatum
MANAGING ATTORNEY, THE LAW OFFICES OF BRANDON E. TATUM

Tatum negotiated a groundbreaking NFT fashion capsule collection and branded comic book for a K-pop client he cannot name, pending confirmation of the deal. Tatum's other clients include SoundCloud, Gala Games/Gala Music, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Sleepy Brown and Teddy Riley.

José J. Torres
FOUNDER, TORRES

Torres keeps a low profile, but he is a key figure in Puerto Rico's music scene with superstar clients including Bad Bunny, Rauw Alejandro and La Buena Fortuna Music (which manages Kany García, Residente, Pedro Capó and Ile, among others). His expertise goes beyond individual artist contracts and routine legal matters. Last year, his firm assisted in closing a major strategic alliance between an independent label and a major U.S. label that "could potentially shape the next five years of new and upcoming Latin artists," says Torres. Of primary concern for 2023, he says, is AI and the "proliferation of new platforms that undervalue and minimize music and creators' rights."

Adam Van Straten
PRINCIPAL, VAN STRATEN SOLICITORS

Van Straten's firm advised Warren Cuccurullo — a 2022 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee as a member of Duran Duran — when Mojo Music & Media acquired his catalog of songwriter and publishing rights, including Cuccurullo's share of artist royalties and neighboring rights in Duran Duran's top 10 Hot 100 hits "Ordinary World" and "Come Undone." Other notable clients include slowthai, Leo Sayer, Koffee and KT Tunstall. In 2023, Van Straten predicts, labels and streaming services will face "increased scrutiny and pressure" to increase royalty payments to artists and songwriters. "The current position is tense," he says. "We need to see greater transparency and an improved position for creatives."

James L. Walker Jr.
PRESIDENT, J. WALKER & ASSOCIATES

Over the past year, Walker has continued winning high-profile cases, including 112 member Marvin "Slim" Scandrick's trademark infringement case and the Andre Sims vs. DJ Camper copyright case. He was an investor in the recent Broadway revival of *The Piano Lesson* starring Samuel L. Jackson and *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations*, the musical about the rise of the titular act. He says protecting copyrights in the digital age is among the industry's most pressing concerns. "We are preparing articles,

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workshops and handouts in this area," he says, "to guide the music and entertainment industry."

Previn Warren
MEMBER, MOTLEY RICE

True to his firm's motto — "Causes not just cases" — Warren represents clients such as SESAC and SoundExchange to ensure musicians earn a fair rate of return from tech and media companies. "I'm representing SESAC in a dispute with the broadcast radio industry to raise the rates that AM/FM should pay to play the compositions of artists as diverse as Bob Dylan and Glass Animals," he says. Warren also notes that the rise of AI "may be an existential moment for artists, not just the industry that supports them. I think it presents significant issues that the industry will have to reckon with."

Douglas H. Wigdor
FOUNDING PARTNER, WIGDOR

Michael J. Willemin
PARTNER, WIGDOR

The firm defeated a motion to dismiss made by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and various universities in connection with their clients' claims that the NCAA continues to violate the Fair Labor Standards Act by failing to pay student athletes the minimum wage. The firm's clients include former Recording Academy president/CEO Deborah Dugan; current and former NFL coaches Brian Flores, Steve Wilks and Ray Horton; model Tarale Wulff, who testified against Harvey Weinstein during his trial in New York; and former Fox associate producer Jennifer Eckhart. On another important topic, Willemin says: "While progress has certainly been made, we look forward to seeing continued advancement in diversity within the music industry, and particularly within its leadership."

Marcus Wiggins
FOUNDER, WIGGINS SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

For the past 12 months, Wiggins — whose clients include Bully Park Records — has been working to recapture royalties for legacy artists New Birth, Dawn Silva (of Brides of Funkenstein), Elijah Baker (Tony! Toni! Toné!) and Jerome Brailey (Parliament-Funkadelic), as well as the label Total Experience (The Gap Band). "If I can assist those who were taken unfair advantage of, I will do my best to help," he says, hoping that the entire industry moves toward creating equity. Of key importance, Wiggins stresses, is for streaming income to fairly reflect streaming numbers.

Richard C. Wolfe
FOUNDING ATTORNEY, WOLFE LAW MIAMI

With notable clients including Maluma, Travis Scott, Menudo and Walter Kolm, Miami-based Wolfe says he has solved three major disputes between artists and managers in the last year (client Danny Ocean with his manager, client Indi-E Entertainment's Jorge Pino with singer Feid and one more he says is confidential). He views copyright termination claims becoming "everyday issues for catalogs that are more than 35 years old" as one of the industry's pressing concerns.

Andrea Yankovsky
FOUNDER, YANKOVSKY LAW

Specializing in intellectual property law for independent businesses and individual creators, Yankovsky makes protection and enforcement accessible. She prevailed in a Trademark Opposition Proceeding at the U.S. Trademark Trial and Appeal Board for client Masterdisk and implemented copyright enforcement strategies for streaming, resulting in takedowns and revenue gain for her clients (most of whom she declines to identify). She says her early experience as a recording engineer "provides a different perspective" and, in addition to bread-and-butter tasks like negotiating output deals and recapturing rights, she founded the OutHouse Counsel program, which is designed to provide indies with the same legal advice more readily available to major labels and their artists.

Helen Yu
FOUNDER, YU LESEBERG

Yu negotiated client Paulo Londra's 2022 label contract with Warner Music Latina after managing litigation that freed the Argentine rapper from label Big Ligas. The resulting album, *Back to the Game* — his first in three years — arrived in November. The firm also closed exclusive apparel deals for client Westside Merchandising with hip-hop supergroup Mount Westmore (Snoop Dogg, Ice-Cube, E-40, Too $hort) as well as hip-hop magazine *The Source*. Yu's diverse roster includes Ty Dolla $ign, Diane Warren, Jeff Gitelman, Gerardo Ortiz, members of the Black Eyed Peas and Adrián Chaparro. Yu says that as the first Asian American woman to lead a music law firm, she is passionate about inclusion and creating opportunities for underdogs.

Adam Zia
OWNER/PARTNER, THE ZIA FIRM

Nate Kuo
PARTNER, THE ZIA FIRM

While continuing to represent Machine Gun Kelly, French Montana, 070 Shake and others, the firm helped singer-songwriter Starrah launch 3:02 Music Group — a publishing joint venture with Pulse Music Group that has since signed a number of rising artists. Zia calls it "an honor" to be part of his client achieving a long-awaited goal, "especially [her] being a Black, LGBTQ+ woman songwriter, artist and now CEO." Fighting for higher compensation for songwriters is among Zia's top priorities: "It remains too difficult for a majority of our songwriting community to earn a proper living, even if writing on successful songs," he says. "Songwriters are too important to music to have such a small piece of the pie."

Leslie Zigel
PARTNER/CHAIR, ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP, SMGQ LAW

Javier Feito
PARTNER, ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP, SMGQ LAW

Zigel and Feito represent Pitbull, Marco Antonio Solís and Carlos Vives, among other top stars, and recently served as counsel for Puerto Rican reggaetón duo Wisin & Yandel's *La Última Misión* world tour, which included 14 concerts at the Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot. The firm also served as general counsel for Maffio's label Alkatraks Records and as lead counsel for the 2022 Billboard Latin Music Awards and Latin American Music Awards for client MBS Productions. Zigel cites "the inefficiency of royalty collection and payment processes with the labels, music publishers, [digital service providers] and YouTube" as among the industry's most pressing concerns. "It has led to several billions of dollars of monies being held in escrow due to misattribution of royalty recipients, incorrect split sheets and label copy."

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METHODOLOGY
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The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...

"...we routinely educate and inform artists and songwriters early on in their careers to create and implement strategic business strategies and structures, which take advantage of certain inherent rights and long-term monetization — many of which the majors have implemented for decades."
—SIMRAN SINGH, SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN

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Libianca photographed by Liam Woods on March 17 in Los Angeles.

LIBIANCA

The rising Afrobeats star has become a much-needed voice with breakout hit "People"

Libianca will always remember last year's Friendsgiving — because she ran to the bathroom sobbing in the middle of it. She had recently quit her job and was questioning the future of her career as a singer. But later in November, she turned her distress into a breakout hit after finding a beat on YouTube. What began as a therapy session that she recorded using Apple's Logic Pro soon formed the foundation for "People," her ticket to stardom.

Born in Minnesota, the 22-year-old Afrobeats artist moved to Cameroon, Africa, with her family when she was 4. Inspired by her first babysitter, who would sing around the house, she started writing songs at 10. By 13, after moving back to the United States, she joined a local choir and later learned how to engineer, record and mix her own vocals. She was covering songs such as SZA's "Good Days" and Billie Eilish's "Everything I Wanted" in her teens — the latter of which she performed as a contestant on *The Voice* in 2021. She independently released one-offs following her elimination from the show, yet her later single "People" is the one that cut through, with poignant lyrics like the opening line: "I've been drinking more alcohol for the past five days/Did you check on me?"

Libianca first played the song for her manager, M3tro, whom she met five years ago as a student at the University of Minnesota. Days later, she posted a teaser clip on TikTok. "Waking up the next morning to so many people feeling so connected to the song [was special]," Libianca says. "I saw families sending me videos of their babies singing the song and [had] women messaging me about the shit that they go through in their homes and how this song needs to drop ASAP because it's calling to their hearts." The viral clip has over 4.7 million views on TikTok.

Less than a week after the initial post, Libianca shared a live rendition, filmed in front of a simple colored backdrop. The DIY post has since earned 1.2 million views on Instagram and 2.5 million on TikTok — and caught the attention of acclaimed U.K. producer Jae5, who reached out to Libianca and eventually signed her to his 5K Records last December. That same month, "People" debuted on *Billboard*'s U.S. Afrobeats Songs chart, where it has held at a No. 2 high since mid-January.

The song also became Libianca's first entry on the Billboard Global 200 and Billboard Global Excl. U.S. charts. And in March, she enlisted fellow Afrobeats stars Omah Lay and Ayra Starr for a remix to maximize the crossover momentum. She'll release her next single in April, with an EP to follow. "Being vulnerable in my music has always been a standard," she says. "I want every one of my songs to be an experience, rather than just doing what I need to do to get the next check."

—CARL LAMARRE

No. 2

PEAK ON *BILLBOARD'S*

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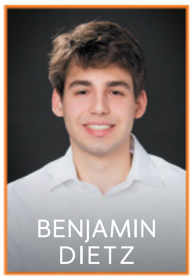
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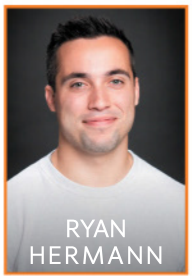
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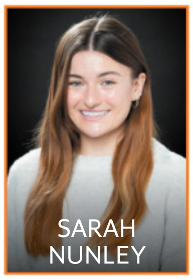
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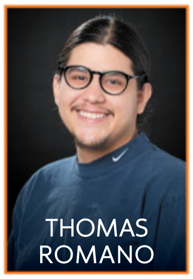
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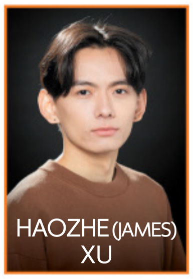
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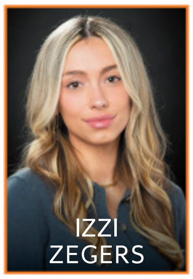
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